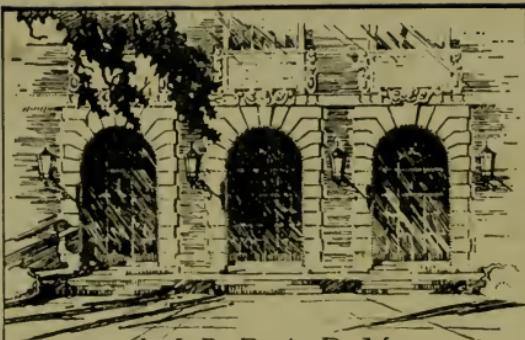


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IT IS NO WONDER.

VOL. III.

Madame de Lamalle

IT IS NO WONDER

A Story of Bohemian Life

BY

J. FITZGERALD MOLLOY

"In robe and crown the king stept down
To meet and greet her on her way;
'It is no wonder,' said the lords,
'She is more beautiful than day.'"

TENNYSON'S *Beggar Maid.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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IT IS NO WONDER.

CHAPTER I.

FAREWELL.

IT was almost evening on the next day before Capri could make good her escape from Mrs. Lordson, and, on pretence of going to see her father, take her way towards the attic studio in Fitzroy Street.

She had scarcely slept during the night; it seemed to her as if the whole scene at Mrs. Stonex Stanning's had been merely a dream. At times during the long night, she brought herself to believe that Lord

Herrick's proposal was an imaginary incident which had but existence in her overwrought mind.

But it was true, quite true, she repeated to herself over and over again, as if to stamp the fact in her mind beyond possibility of further doubt. She went over the scenes of the night in her mind, remembered the alcove half screened by the tall palms where she had sat with Lord Herrick, felt him press her hand, heard him say that he loved her, and wanted her to become his wife, and remembered her answer.

Yes, it was all true. She was to become the future Viscountess Herrick, that was quite settled. She, Capri, who had run bare-legged about the strands of her native island long ago ; Capri, the daughter of a singer of La Scala ; Capri, the Bohemian who had lived half her life in a

back pair of rooms on the third flight of a lodging house in the Euston Road; who had taught music for a shilling a lesson, and who looked on a present of a pair of gloves or a ribbon from her pupils as providentially-sent gifts. Could it be possible that this great change would come in her life to transform it, and make it brighter far than anything she had ever thought of in her most ambitious day-dreams? Had she not once said to Marcus Phillips that it was the improbable things which were possible; and but a few months ago what could have been more seemingly improbable than that which was now about to happen?

It was truly wonderful! so Mrs. Lordson said when Capri told her of the proposal over their coffee and toast the morning following Mrs. Stonex Stanning's reception.

“ You take my breath away,” said the

American lady, staring at her in amazement, and laying down her Rose du Barri cup with a haste which threatened to smash it to atoms. "And yet I knew it was coming. I saw it. But now that it has come, and you have told me of it so suddenly, my dear, it does take me aback. To think of it all, Capri; you will be my lady and a real vizcountess. Well, life is strange, I'm sure.

"Very strange," replied Capri thoughtfully.

"And yet my only wonder is that he did not ask you the day we went to Richmond," she said, for the observant woman had seen Lord Harrick plainly make love to Capri on that day, and marvelled why the viscount had not proposed on such a favourable occasion.

"He only asked me last night," replied Capri.

"It was the Greek dress, my dear, that completed the charm; and very well you looked in it, I'm sure."

Capri laughed, or made an attempt to laugh, which ended almost in a sob. The prospect of her future made her glad, but she was far from being happy.

"And to think you never told me the news last night," said Mrs. W. Achilles Lordson, munching some dry toast. "How could you keep it so long from me?"

The good woman felt inclined to be indignant at such a sweet morsel of intelligence being kept from her a few hours.

"Dear Mrs. Lordson," said Capri in her most gentle tone, looking at the matron out of her great dark eyes with a world of seeming confidence and affection in them, "you are the first I have told. I could hardly realize it last night. It came like —like a shock to me—I was surprised,

and almost unprepared for this offer."

She raised her eyes to Mrs. Lordson's face, and went over and laid her hand gently on the matron's plump arm.

"Oh, my dear, I knew he would propose sooner or later before the season was over," she replied, lying back comfortably in her chair, and opening wide her eyes at Capri's confessed want of perception. "Anyone with half an eye in her head could see that by him, my dear," she continued good-humouredly, quite forgiving Capri for her reticence, "and I'm sure it's proud he should be of having won such a handsome wife, though I say it to your face, my dear, and its a beautiful vizcountess you will make, Capri, and I shall give you a trousseau and a wedding-dress, the handsomest Worth can make," added the good-natured matron, delighted at the prospect which the excitement and bustle

of the coming marriage would afford her.

"You are too good, too generous and kind," said Capri earnestly, who was genuinely touched by her words, "much more so than I deserve." There was no smile now upon her face.

"Tut, tut," said Mrs. Lordson, rising from her dainty little table; and putting one hand on Capri's shoulder she kissed her on the forehead gently.

At midday Lord Harrick called, and placed a quaint pearl ring, that had been an heirloom in his family for centuries, on Capri's finger; it had historic associations he told her, Mary Stuart had given it to an ancestress of his on the eve of that ill-fated monarch's execution. This ring was the seal of their engagement.

Capri looked at him gratefully, and thanked him, and admired the antique setting of the pearls in their band of massive

gold. Lord Harrick felt glad that such a simple act of his had given her so much pleasure.

Capri in a white cashmere dress, her face pale from excitement, her dark eyes seeming larger and more luminous than ever, her dark hair with its shade of dusky gold brushed closely round her small head, looked wonderfully handsome.

Mrs. W. Achilles Lordson stayed with them a little while to offer her congratulations in demonstrative terms ; and, having asked the viscount to stay to luncheon, left them alone. Capri was silent and grave towards him ; but as Lord Harrick had not seen her in one of these moods before, and was moreover very much in love, he thought this change suited her far better than did her more lively humours.

She listened to his plans for the future, for their future, as if she had no personal

concern in the arrangements, listened without making a suggestion, wondering now and then in her own mind why Providence had made his hair so red, and his eyes so round and blue and full of wonder at nothing in particular.

He took her hands in his as he had done that day long ago in her sitting-room in the Euston Road when she had told him she was going to live with Mrs. Lordson. She was somewhat cold, absent-minded, and nervous this morning after her sleepless night, and the prospect before her of breaking the news of her engagement to Marcus Phillips ; the thought of what the artist would say and think hung over her like a shadow and depressed her. She wondered if the luncheon time would ever arrive when Mrs. Lordson's presence would relieve her from being face to face with her promised husband. Another day,

she told herself, she could bear with him much better, but to-day he irritated her and made her strangely fretful and unhappy. Of course that feeling would wear away; in their future lives they would harmonize or tone down to a placid indifference, she thought, it was only because her spirits were low this morning that she felt his presence an insufferable bore. Time and a short experience of married life would change all that.

She answered his questions as briefly as possible, and listened to his love-making as if his words were addressed to some invisible person. She had no responsive terms of endearment for him; and bore his kisses with the air of a pet pug disturbed in his comfortable dreams by the caresses of his mistress.

Lord Harrick was insensible to her coldness; no thought of her indifference oc-

curred to him. His own affection was so great that it reflected itself in her ; he believed she loved him, and he was quite happy in the fool's paradise which he fashioned and shaped for himself.

During their interview Capri smiled but once, and that was when Mrs. Lordson entered the drawing-room to say that luncheon was served. Then Capri had to take the usual drive in the Row with Mrs. Lordson, after which she was at liberty.

After the excitement of the previous night, a sharp reaction had set in which lasted all day ; that was what continued to make her dull and unhappy, she told herself ; for we like to make matters clear to ourselves occasionally, and enter into mental discussions and explanations with ourselves which somehow never have the effect of settling the point at issue or quieting our minds. As she prepared her-

self for her drive that afternoon, the sight of her face in the mirror startled her from the look of sadness that it betrayed.

"No one would ever think to look at you," she said, addressing her reflection, "that a great piece of good luck was about to happen," and she smiled, but the smile was a wretched attempt at gaiety that made her look more miserable yet.

If, however, she had felt depressed during the day, she felt her heart sink as she entered Fitzroy Street and rapped at the once familiar door of the house where Marcus Phillips lived. It was the same maid who had opened that friendly portal for her many a time in the light-hearted days just gone by, that now admitted her. The abigail drew back to a more respectful distance now, and was far less familiar in her replies.

"Mr. Phillips was in," she said, and offered to announce Miss Dankers.

Capri thanked her, but preferred going upstairs and announcing herself. So up she went, not running as she had done so often during those merry months when she sat for the "Beggar Maid," but ascending the four flights slowly and gravely which led to the studio. She rapped timidly, and, when the artist shouted out "Come in," she could hear her heart beat, and hesitated a second or two before turning the handle and entering the room. Marcus was standing before a picture, a pipe in one hand and a palette-knife in the other.

"Why, Capri," he said, coming over to her at once in his old familiar manner, "I did not know your rap, or I should have run and let you in. I am so glad you have come at last."

"At last," she said, striving to smile.

"You have not been here, I think, since you migrated to Mayfair?"

"No, I believe I have not."

"And I was afraid you had forgotten your promise of last night."

"You see I did not," she answered him, looking round the room.

He had evidently made some preparations for her coming. There was a great bouquet of flowers on the bracket, that looked fresh and bright, the paint-pots were all cleared away from the centre of the room; there were no brushes or palette-knives on the floor, the easels were put away in the corners, and altogether the studio had the look of having had a general clearing up.

The artist himself seemed included in the tidying arrangements; his long light hair was brushed back, its curls meeting

the collar of his velvet coat ; he had on a blue shirt, fastened at the neck with a crimson scarf. He looked more picturesque and handsome than ever, Capri thought, and the look of happiness that came over his face as she entered the studio struck her with keen reproach.

“I could not get away sooner to-day,” she said.

He did not notice that her manner was unusually quiet and subdued.

“Sit down here,” he said, drawing over a great high-backed, curiously-carved chair upholstered in velvet, that, in the pride of its days, owned a crimson colour, but which was now sadly faded to a dull neutral tint.

“What a handsome chair !” she said by way of delaying the moment of her confession as long as she could. “You bought it lately ?”

“Yes, in Wardour Street. It dates from Louis XI.”

“It is a gem,” she said, sitting down on it quietly with her face to the light.

“I thought of you when I was buying it; I said to myself how well you would look in it, and now I see that I was right.”

Capri made him no reply, she did not even smile at his words.

“Now tell me why you did not come sooner, Capri, for I have been expecting you since midday, until at last I had almost given up all hopes of your coming.”

He had seated himself on a camp-stool a little in front of her; leaning his elbows on his knees, he gazed up into her face.

She did not speak for a while; she took off her hat and laid it on the ground beside her, then she leaned her head, with its undertone of gold, against the faded cush-

ion of the chair and placed her hands on its grotesquely-carved arms.

She looked more like a picture now than ever, Marcus Phillips thought, as he looked into her face with pleasure and delight. Capri was thinking how she would best commence what she had come to say. If she could only begin, the rest would follow with comparative ease; but every time she attempted to begin, her heart beat so rapidly that she felt incapable for the time of utterance.

At length she summoned courage and said, as calmly as she could,

“Dear Marc, you have always been so good and kind to me——”

“Don’t say that,” he interrupted, wondering what she was going to say, and making it all the more difficult for her to get the words out.

“That I fear,” she continued slowly,

unheeding his words, “I may give you pain by what I have to tell.”

“Nothing that you can say will give me pain, Capri,” he answered her, with a world of love and gentleness in his voice. “Only tell me if there is anything I can do for you—if there is any way I can help you.”

“No, no,” she said hurriedly, and without looking at him; his words were to her more reproachful than she could bear.

“What is it?” he asked quickly, in a voice that sounded hoarse and low; the light faded from his face.

She could answer him more easily now. She drew a long breath, and said slowly, though every word caused her a strange pain,

“I have promised Lord Harrick to become his wife.”

“Oh Capri!” he cried out, like a man

stricken to the heart with steel, and with a reproach in his tones that haunted her for long.

He buried his face in his hands, and there was silence in the room far more terrible than all reproach.

“Marc, Marc,” she whispered low, after a while, seeing the strong man’s tears dripping through the fingers covering his face.

He made no reply.

“Only speak to me, dear Marc,” she ventured to say presently, in a low trembling voice. “I know I am wicked, and wretched, and ungrateful to you ; but only speak to me. Say you can forgive me.”

He never answered.

Once or twice she saw his breast heave, saw the veins stand out in his forehead, and the hot tears drop slowly on his knees, and heard the sobs in his throat as he strug-

gled to command himself. She had expected to see him pained, but she never dreamt the news she had to tell would cause him such bitter grief.

"Marc, say something," she said, rising from her chair and standing beside him. She could bear the silence no longer. "Tell me that I am worthless; that you hate me, despise me, only speak."

She laid her hand lightly on his shoulder. He shuddered at her touch, and rose up at once. A sudden change had come over him, such as comes to men in moments when they are brought face to face with peril and death, moments in whose space the agony of a life is concentrated. All light and colour had faded from his face, his eyes looked sunken, his features drawn and haggard.

"Tell me," he said, in a voice which Capri would never have recognized as his.

“Tell me honestly. Do you—do you love him?”

It was her turn to hide her face now: her eyes, for the first time since she knew him, could not meet Marcus Phillips' gaze.

“Love him!” she repeated, as if the question had presented itself to her mind for the first time, and now awoke a train of unpleasant and almost repulsive thoughts.

“No.”

“And you have promised to marry this man. Will you dare to swear ‘love, honour, and obedience’ to him at God’s altar? and turn the most sacred of rites into a farce and a hollow mockery?”

She did not speak, but stood cowering there before him, her head lowered, her frame trembling in every limb.

“Will you walk through life with him till death releases you? serve him as your

lord and master, cling to him, find your happiness in his love, be faithful to him in all things, rear up his children and yours because he gives you an empty-sounding title and a settlement of a few thousands a year? It is a just barter."

The words fell on her ears, and cut her more cruelly than whips could scourge the flesh; cut her all the keener and deeper because of the force of their truth.

"It is a just barter," he went on, the words falling hurriedly from his lips. His face was now flushed with anger, and his eyes flashed with a fire that was new to them. "A just barter. But which of you will have the better bargain? A few months, and you will tire and sicken of this contract, you will loathe him and become disgusted with yourself; the title and the money for which you sell your life, your happiness, your very soul, will have

lost their value in your sight, and weigh light as thistle-down against an hour of the love you now close your heart to ; you will hate and despise them, your existence will become a horrid mockery, and a living, hateful lie before the world."

"Oh ! Marc, Marc," she sobbed out bitterly, cowering down before him ; she could bear no more. Salt tears gathered in her eyes and blinded her, the room swam round her, and the sound of her voice fell like a cry on her ears.

It was a cry that struck Marcus Phillips to the heart ; he could not hear it unmoved. In a moment all his wrath died out, and only his love and pity for her lived and triumphed. In an instant he was on his knees before her. She had sunk back into the chair ; he took her hands in his, and laid his forehead on her knees.

“Capri, forgive my words, forgive me, my love, my darling, whom I would die to save from pain or ill. I sought to save you from yourself; from the love of the world which has filled your heart and sickened it with a craving for hollow pleasures, for vanities in which there is nothing real, from a prospect which now blinds and dazzles you, and prevents your seeing the pit-fall on the brink of which you stand; from a compact which robs you of your better nature, and closes your soul against a love that would brighten all your days.”

She put her hands upon his shoulders, and put her arms round his neck tenderly, and passed her fingers through his hair, sobbing all the while as if her heart were breaking, whilst hot tears ran down her cheeks like rain.

“Capri, my love!—Capri, I have been a

wretch, a brute, to say such words to you, forget them and forgive me."

"Ah! Marc, there is nothing to forgive," she said, when her sobs had partly subsided, and she could manage to speak. "Your words are all too true, I fear. I know it is because of their truth that they strike so hard."

He turned white, and his breath came thick and heavy.

"Then, if you think so, surely—surely you will not marry *him*."

There was a cry of pain in his voice, though he strove to speak calmly, a sound of dull despair, like the wail of a strong man in his death agony.

"I have promised," she said, slowly and deliberately, "and I must keep my word."

As she spoke she withdrew her hand half reluctantly from his head yet laid upon her knees. He had awaited her

answer breathlessly : the second that elapsed before she spoke seemed to him an hour.

“ Must ? ” he said, making a last effort to save her from herself. “ Must, even though the act brings you a life-long misery ? ”

“ Yes,” she replied, and her voice sounded harsh and hoarse.

She dried her eyes ; how lovely they looked, the artist thought, softened with tears that yet hung like dew upon the long, dark lashes. He rose to his feet without another word. She held out her right hand to him ; he hesitated a moment, then took it and pressed it gently in his own.

A long, quivering sigh came from her heart ; tears rose once more to her eyes, but she strove bravely to suppress them.

“ Sit down,” she said calmly.

He obeyed her passively as if he were a

child ; her collected manner had the power of subduing him.

“ After what has passed between us,” she commenced, “ I may now speak to you as—as a friend.”

For answer he pressed the hand yet within his own.

“ I could have written you the news of my engagement,” she went on, “ or have let you hear it from some one else ; but I thought it best to tell you myself, for I knew it would cause you less pain hearing it from my lips. I knew that—that you loved me,” she said, very gently.

“ Loved you, and love you still, with all my heart and soul,” he cried out fervently, looking into her face.

“ You see I speak plainly now; I knew you loved me,” she went on not returning his glance, and speaking hurriedly, without appearing to notice his last sentence,

though in reality it sank into her heart, “and I also knew that I was and am unworthy of you, that I could never wait patiently like a good wife until you became rich and were able to give me all I desire; never be able to subdue my ambition and love of position and wealth, and all that money can bring. Why I should long for all these things, Heaven only knows; but the yearning for them was early implanted in me, and grew with my growth and strength. It is the working out of some fate, I suppose, which we cannot understand. It is all the stranger, perhaps, that I should care for them, never having tasted until lately all the pleasures and benefits, and therefore not knowing what the deprivations of them meant; now that I have experience, I never could renounce them.”

She paused a moment. Her hand was

now in his, and he felt her slim fingers twitching nervously.

“Last night,” she continued, “he, Lord Harrick, offered me far more than I had ever hoped or longed for : wealth, position, title. I had but one word to say, and they were mine.”

“And you said it?” he broke out, bitterly.

“Consider how much they mean to me ; a penniless, homeless, almost friendless girl. I said the word, and I shall marry him.”

When she ended there was silence between them for some time.

“You do not know what love is ; true love overcomes all things.”

For all answer she sighed.

“Is the honest affection of a heart worth all these things which you gain ?” he asked her in a low voice.

"One cannot have everything in life," she answered evasively. "Love is very sweet and precious," she went on, "but love is of little account in a hard, sordid world like ours." She cast down her eyes, for the tears were dimming them once more.

"Love is all-sufficient where hearts are true," he answered.

"But love and poverty have such hard battles in life, and the strongest is sure to conquer sooner or later."

"The stronger is—"

"Poverty. I have seen it all my days."

"How can you harden your heart?"

If he only knew how far from being hardened it was then, only knew how she longed to give up the world and flinging herself into his arms seek protection in his love for ever! In the silence that followed a great struggle went on in her heart: all

that was good and bad in her nature rose in arms and fought against each other. All that the future promised came up before her in its most seductive brightness ; all that the past had made her suffer stood out in darkness, in vivid contrast. She should keep her promise to Lord Harrick.

“ Marc,” she said after a while, “ you have always been good and generous to me, and you gave me your love, a prize of which the best woman on earth might feel proud, whilst I have acted like a serpent; I feel I have, and yet I cannot help myself. It is a pity I ever crossed your path, and yet our old life, our old friendship, was very dear and precious to me.”

“ And how much more precious to me, God only knows,” he said, looking into her face lovingly.

“ For the sake of the past time can you forgive me ?” she said, lowering her

voice and speaking in a pleading tone.

For answer he took the hand he held in his and kissed it.

Just for a moment, whilst his lips rested on her fingers, the blood rushed into her face, a bright happy look came to her eyes. Next moment it was gone.

“Will you make me a promise?”

“I can refuse you nothing,” he answered.

“Promise that you will always be my friend,” she said, almost in a whisper.

“Before heaven I promise you.”

The words fell with reverence on Capri’s ear.

“There is one thing more which I would like to say, if you will allow me, as—as a friend,” she said, and then hesitated.

“Say whatever you please.”

“If so, I will say that I believe a good and true woman, who has already been a

friend to you, has—has given you her heart."

"Capri!" he said, starting up as if the words stung him.

"Sit down, Marc. I do not wish to hurt you. Remember I say this as a friend. I have watched the woman I speak of when you approach her; one of our sex never errs in these matters; we see at a glance what you men may not come to the knowledge of for years; this is my reason for speaking to you now, Marc."

"Say no more," he said, rising up again and walking to the window.

Capri rose too.

The light was fading in the sky, the tree-tops in the neighbouring square waved above the roofs of the opposite houses. Once she looked on the bouquet of flowers resting on the bracket—the flowers which he had got to make the

studio bright and pleasant for her coming. She went over unhesitatingly, reached up her hands, and took out a purple-leaved pansy.

He turned just then and saw her.

“Good-bye, Marc,” she said, holding out her hand to him ; she strove to steady her voice ; she looked at him through a mist of tears.

With one sudden stride he stood before her, and flung his arms around her, and clasped her to himself passionately. He felt her trembling in his grasp, felt her heart fluttering wildly, heard her breath coming fast.

“Oh ! Capri, my darling, must we part —must you say good-bye ? Why—why must you leave me ?” he broke out wildly, pressing her closer and closer to his breast.

His whole frame swayed with passion, his voice was like a cry of pain.

A great convulsive sob rising from the girl's heart was the only answer he received. He bent down his head till his hair brushed her cheek, to which the blood had leaped flame-like ; his lips met hers in a wild, fervid kiss that had in it all the force and flavour of his passion.

"Capri, Capri, have some heart ! Did you but love me as I love you, you would think all heaven and earth too small a sacrifice for my love."

The words broke from him with a cry almost of despair. All the sorrow of his soul was in the sound.

She did not speak. Still clasped in his arms, she laid her head on his shoulder and silently cried.

"It is not yet too late," he went on. "Give all your ambitions up, and I shall love you, worship you as woman never was loved or worshipped before."

He felt her whole frame quiver ; her hands clung to him tenderly, lovingly, as if loth to take themselves from his touch. Then suddenly, and in an instant, she disengaged herself from his clasp, and stood before him.

“Good-bye, Marc,” she said, between her sobs, which she strove in vain to suppress.

He stood motionless as a statue now. None could tell, from the exterior calmness which quickly came upon him, of the great passion that swayed his soul, and made him almost mad from the effort of suppression. His face was deadly pale, his eyes were fixed, his lips white and set. He did not answer her last words. She turned towards the door, hesitated, looked back once, and ran to where he stood, acting on a sudden impulse.

“Good-bye, dear Marc,” she said once

more, and reaching up her face she kissed him on the lips.

In another second she had left the room, and Marcus Phillips was alone.

CHAPTER II.

LEFT ALONE.

THE door closed behind Capri with that hollow sound, it seemed to the artist, with which the dull earth falls upon the coffin of one we have loved. He listened to her footfall going down the stairs, and the full sense of all he had lost for ever, the true knowledge of his sorrow came upon him.

With a cry breaking from his lips, he flung himself face downwards upon the couch where the girl had so often sat in by-gone, happy days, and lay there as the

evening wore on, and the coming night chased the last sunrays from the sky.

He was stunned by the blow which his fondest hopes, his brightest prospects of happiness, his tenderest affections had so suddenly received. He lay quite still and silent, with the sense of a great sorrow, which at present he felt that he but half comprehended, weighing him down. He only knew that all the world was lost to him, that suddenly all his life was rendered dark and terribly drear, that his whole future was shrouded in dense blackness upon which not the slightest ray of hope or comfort beamed.

When early in life a great sorrow falls upon us, we believe that never again can we know happiness or peace; that no spring will come for us and melt the wintry wilderness of our hearts, that no coming suns can make the flowers of dead

hopes rise from their ashes, and bud and blossom with fresh fragrance for us in any future time. So Marcus Phillips thought now. All existence had lost its flavour for him ; his future life he believed would be a hopeless waste of time, without pleasure and devoid of happiness ; his days were dead in the very freshness of their early dawn, and nothing could ever rouse them again to the old lightheartedness of the past. He had never before suspected the depth and force of his love for Capri. It is only strong situations which enable us to know ourselves. Few men, and fewer women can gauge their hearts, for human hearts are ever mysteries. Half a century may pass, and at the end of that period we may discover in ourselves some new feelings, or passions, or power of which for the greater part of a life-time we may have been ignorant. Circumstance is

the great crucible which tries us and shows us of what metal we are really made, for we only come to the knowledge of ourselves by results.

Hours passed by, and the young artist still lay there almost motionless, bearing the weight of his keen disappointment as best he could. A little while ago he would not believe that any woman's heart, above all, the heart of this girl whom he loved, could have been so hardened to all claims of affection, so deaf to all entreaties, so cruelly cold to all assurances of affection. He would have gladly sacrificed all things to her love; he would have died to save her from pain or misery, and she on her part would not give up her ambitions, her craving for dignity, position, and wealth, even to follow the dictates of her own heart, and enjoy the happiness which their mutual love would ensure. This cruel

disappointment in her was one of his bitterest pangs. He went over the whole scene of her farewell again and again, lived it all over once more; heard the first cruel announcement fall from her lips which had made the sudden tears leap to his eyes; repeated his scathing words; heard her cry out in anguish; saw himself kneeling at her feet whilst he pleaded for her happiness, for the exercise and judgment of her better self, even as good angels plead to men for their souls.

Then in their last farewell he felt his arms once more wind around her, felt her heart—gone wild in the trouble of its great agony—beat against his breast, felt his lips pressed to hers, heard her last words, “Good-bye, dear Marc,” sound like a death-knell, and felt her scorching kiss meet his lips for the last time.

With such memories he lacerated his

heart until it bled afresh ; he took a morbid kind of pleasure in the infliction, as we all do in opening up our wounds for the purpose of crying over them anew. All the scene came back to him there in the darkening room with a force and reality that mocked and tempted him, as devils mocked and tempted the first hermit. He stretched out his arms yearningly, as if he yet beheld her before him ; then a dull sob broke from his lips, for the misery of life was strong upon him.

Through the uncurtained window he watched the dull blue of the sky, crossed by darkening clouds ; by-and-by the first faint stars came out pale and wan, far bedded in the purple skies. Far down the street the melancholy notes of a German band woefully out of tune played a waltz hopelessly out of all time, a waltz that would fain have been cheerful, but which,

played by those stolid Teutonic musicians, sounded like a horrid mockery of itself, at which the unchanging note of the bassoon brayed in hoarse derision.

When this had ceased, the quiet air of the summer night was again disturbed by a piano-organ playing an air from a popular opera-bouffe immediately underneath the window. It jarred painfully on his feelings, and he never afterwards could listen to the tune without the sense of that night's misery coming back upon him. He heard the organ-grinder play his half-dozen airs over and over two or three times, to the intense delight of some country folk lodging in the first floor, who rewarded the musical foreigner with many smiles and twopence.

Then came silence once more for an indefinite space, broken on suddenly by the sounds of footsteps outside. A knock

sounded at the door, immediately after it was opened, and Newton Marrix entered. The room was now in darkness, and Marcus Phillips felt sure he could not be seen, and hesitated a moment as to whether he would let his friend go away without revealing himself to him, or make his presence known. He felt but in little humour for Newton Marrix's conversation, and yet the presence of a friend at that moment made him feel as if he were less alone in life ; the sight of a friendly face was a comfort which he could not afford to dispense with just then.

"Out, by Jove," said the author, stumbling over a chair as he prepared to quit the studio again.

"No," said Marcus, "I am here."

"What the deuce are you doing there in the dark, old man?" he said in surprise.
"You have been asleep surely," and, so

saying, he came over to the couch, feeling his way slowly, and sat down.

“Asleep! Perhaps I have,” said Marcus Phillips, holding out his hand.

His friend grasped it heartily, and then he felt that something, though he could not imagine what, had happened amiss to the artist.

“Shall I strike a light?” he asked. “I have matches in my pocket.”

“If you don’t mind, I had rather we remained in the gloaming. It’s the best part of the twenty-four hours, I think. Everything is softened and subdued, and I always find this time most soothing, don’t you?” he asked, not caring to encounter the glare of the gaslight just yet.

“Gloaming?” said the rising author. “Why, it’s quite dark, Marc.”

"Ah! so it is, I believe. It's a darker shade of gloaming."

"Marc," said Newton Marrix, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder as he still lay on the couch. "Marc, old fellow, what is the matter? What has gone wrong with you?"

The artist felt the friendliness of Newton Marrix's motive. He pressed his hand, but did not speak.

"What is it?" the author asked again. "Make a clean breast of it to me, old man. Is it anything about your picture?"

"No. I wish it was."

Then Newton Marrix was silent. His thoughts took another direction. He felt it must be something about Capri.

"It is this, New," he said, making an effort to speak calmly. "Capri has promised Lord Harrick to marry him."

His friend gave a long, low whistle to express his astonishment.

"Promised to marry Lord Harrick?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! what a clever girl!"

"Marrix!"

"I beg your pardon, old man, I do indeed. But for some time I saw there was a flirtation going on between them, but I never thought it would come to anything serious." Then he added, thinking of his friend's disappointment, "But probably this is only a rumour. It may not be true."

"It is too true."

"You heard it from——"

"From herself."

"When?"

"Just now, before you came in."

Newton Marrix was silent. He began to realize the sense of all the disappoint-

ment and bitterness which his friend felt.

"Never mind, Marc, old fellow," he said, with a tone underlying his words that was almost as tender as a woman's.
"Never mind. Keep up your heart."

"It's easy to say that. I feel as if all the world was a blank to me now."

"Yes; because the sense of your sorrow is yet keen. That will wear away by-and-by, old man. I know all about that sort of thing myself," he added with amusing self-complacency.

"You cannot tell how I cared for the girl, how I hoped for and looked forward to our marriage as the brightest reward of all my life."

"Does she know this?"

"Yes."

"Then knowing it, and marrying Lord Harrick, I say she is unworthy of you, she is, upon my soul."

"No, no, Newton. She is a free agent, and can make her own choice. She is in every way worthy of the tenderest love and care the best man on earth can give her," he said, starting up from where he lay on the couch.

He might himself think hard things of her, and speak words that fell upon her like stripes, until she winced and cried out from pain, but in his presence even his best friend should speak no light word of her.

"Ah! that is all very well and very fine, old man. Lord Harrick will give her a title and a settlement, and that is all she will ask of him, that is what she marries for, believe me," Newton Marrix said, somewhat bitterly.

"That is ungenerous of you," the artist answered, almost angry with his friend for speaking what he knew to be true.

"But it is a fact," he replied stoutly, not willing to give up his ground. "She makes a sacrifice, throws away the love a man had freely given her, a love such as she will never meet again. I only hope her new life may bring her happiness," he ended, with a short cynical laugh that said plainly, "but I know it won't."

Marcus Phillips rose and walked up and down the room. When his friend had finished he stood before him suddenly. Newton Marrix did not heed him, but went on—

"She is unworthy of you, Marc. Never think of her again, avoid her—"

"Stop," said the artist. "Capri is worthy of the truest affection. If I were not to think of her, life would become even a greater blank than it looks to me now."

"Time will cure you. It patches up and heals many a broken heart."

“In fiction!”

“No, lovers always are true to the last or die gracefully of broken hearts in the world of fiction.”

“You are unfeeling.”

“But sensible.”

“We shall not speak of the subject again, promise me,” and he held out his hand.

“I promise,” said Newton Marrix, and he gave his friend a true and honest grasp in which there was both friendship and sympathy.

“We may have a light now, I suppose, and a cigar, and then we will go out somewhere, old boy.”

He struck a match and lit the gas, then he turned round and faced Marcus Phillips. The artist seemed to have grown ten years older since last he had seen him.

“You have not seen my last picture and my first commission,” Marcus said, trying

to brighten up, but the effort was a failure.

"No," said the author, going over to the canvas and looking at it longer and more attentively than was quite necessary. "It's a charming little picture," he remarked presently. "As well as I can judge by this light, the reflection of the trees in the water is capital; the river looks so calm and flows through that old brown weir so naturally that I can almost hear the splash and the monotonous flow of the water among the tall green reeds lower down."

Marcus Phillips came over and stood behind his friend.

"You like it, New?"

"Like it; I think it delightful," he replied with friendly enthusiasm. "The sight of the place makes me long to run away from town and rest in some cool, shady spot like this."

The artist thrust his hands into the pockets of his velvet coat. In one of them he found his pipe; he took it out and filled it from the tobacco-jar on the chimney-piece.

“Have a cigarette?” he said, handing Newton Marrix a box of Richmond gems.

“Thanks, I have my pipe with me, and I shall take some tobacco instead; but, Marc, whilst you have such a profession, and a chance of making your name, how can you think the world a blank? Live for art, and art alone, in the present, everything else will come to you by-and-by, old man.”

Having delivered himself of this piece of advice, Newton Marrix lit his pipe.

Marcus came over to the picture and looked down on it with light and pleasure stealing over his face, such as come upon a father's bending above the little

figure of one he has brought into life.

"Ay, art is a noble thing; a man may forget everything, even his own heart, in worshipping at such a shrine."

He took up a brush that lay on the shelf of the easel, and commenced touching the canvas here and there lightly and rapidly.

His friend stood by his side, and watched his face as well as he could see it from the clouds of smoke that escaped his lips. He saw that his profession was the one thing in his life which could cure the artist of his heartache, saw that in contemplating it all other things were almost forgotten.

"Do you know, Marc, an idea has just struck me."

"That's nothing new; ideas have a knack of doing that, I know."

"Yes; but this is about you."

"With a philanthropic idea of benefiting me, I hope."

"Of course."

"Then let me hear it, by all means."

"Well, I think you should go abroad and study art for a short time—say in Italy; it would do you a world of good in many ways."

He knew that Newton Marrix meant he should go away more for the purpose of forgetting Capri than of studying; it was a delicately-given hint, and he appreciated his friend's kindness.

"I daresay it would do me good," he replied thoughtfully, "I daresay it would, but I fear I cannot manage it this autumn."

"You should try."

"I shall go down into the country instead, and study rural life in Kent or Sussex next month."

"Yes, that would be all very well in its

way, but you want a thorough change; want to see new faces around you, fresh sights, different scenes, and, above all, a glimpse of the picture-galleries and those glorious art-gems half hidden in the dim old churches, and all those associations which the continent only can afford."

"Yes, it would be all very well, but, as I said, I fear I cannot manage it for a while longer—not this year at least."

"Not manage it when you have sold your ' Beggar Maid ' picture!"

"I shall strive to get the picture back again; I am glad to say I have not touched the money yet."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow; consider what a price you have got for it. I think you were deucedly lucky in the matter."

"So did I; but that does not matter. I would rather not sell it to *him*."

"And if he is willing to give it up,

which I doubt very much under the circumstances, what will you do with it, Marc?"

"I have not yet made up my mind."

"You cannot keep it yourself. It would set you mad to have it before your face here in the studio every hour of the day, it would simply mean distraction at the end of a week; and then if you dispose of it, why not Lord Harrick have it as well as anyone to whom the dealers would sell it for probably a very much lower figure?"

"Well, there is no use in talking about it; I have made up my mind to strive at least, and get it back from him. I shall ask the friend through whom the purchase was made to request him to give it back to me."

"That friend is Mrs. Stonex Stanning."

"Yes."

"Believe me, Marc, she is a good, noble-hearted woman."

"I know that," he responded briefly.

"A woman whose affection will bless the man she bestows it on through all his days."

Marcus Phillips remembered Capri's words, and then went back in thought to that morning visit when Mrs. Stonex Stanning had written and asked him to call. There was something in her manner which he could not then understand, but which he now read with a new light. What Capri had said was probably true, though he had not suspected it before. There was a tenderness in Mrs. Stonex Stanning's manner which few women had shown him.

"I only wonder," said Newton Marrix, "that she has not made some fellow happy

long ago by taking him for better or worse."

"Probably she prefers liberty."

"Maybe; but then liberty is all very well for a man, but for a woman——"

"It is also well, if she desires it."

"You go in for equality of sex."

"I think it advisable. I believe it would be better for both men and women."

"Well, I take it that liberty, that is freedom from the matrimonial yoke, means solitariness to women. It is not well for them to be alone, and I only wonder why Mrs. Stonex Stanning, who is young, wealthy, and handsome, has not married."

"She may be happier as she is. Now she does not reign over one subject, as if she were married, but over many."

"But women should not reign."

"You are a despot."

"It is her duty to be an obedient subject, loyal and faithful in all things."

"You are tyrannical."

"But, jesting apart, it does seem strange to me. She has refused two capital offers. She might now be a peeress, if she had so desired."

"So I have heard," said Marcus Phillips, quickly. "Shall we go out?"

"By all means. You want something to stir you up, old man."

"Where shall we go?"

"To see the new burlesque at the Gaiety."

"No, I don't feel in the humour for that to-night."

"If you are inclined for tragedy, let us go to the Lyceum; if we can get in, we

shall yet be in time for the last acts of
‘Othello.’”

“No, I am not in a murderous frame of
mind either.”

“Then you speak, and I’ll obey.”

“We shall go and dine somewhere
first.”

“Good. If you continue to exercise
such wisdom, I will be subject to you in
all things.”

“And afterwards——”

“We can philosophize. Philosophy al-
ways comes easy to a man who has dined
well, my dear boy.”

“Hang philosophy!”

“With all my heart. Your wisdom
increases: philosophy means wisdom; it is
only fools who are wise: wise men are
fools. Granted. Now where do we go
after dinner?”

"We shall take a walk through Hyde Park; the cool night air will do us good."

"Then let us to dinner. 'Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war.'"

CHAPTER III.

A NEW BOND.

NEXT day about one o'clock Marcus Phillips knocked at Mrs. Stonex Stanning's door, and was shown into the same morning-room where but a short time ago he had waited with some impatience to hear what that lady had had to communicate to him. The apartment was scarcely changed. The faint fragrance of the flowers in the adjoining conservatory pervaded the room, some tea-roses were in the old Greek vase on the little table, the picture of "Youth and Death" hung in its accustomed place on the wall, the midday

sun came in softly through the half-drawn curtains. All was the same.

Yet what different feelings possessed him when last he had sat here! Then great expectations had filled his mind when he heard of the offer made for his picture. Triumph, and hope, and happiness had elated him then, and made him dream wild dreams of the future, and Capri, and bliss which now could never be realized.

His heart grew heavy as he thought of it all, thought of how gladly he had rushed to tell the news to Capri, of his meeting Lord Harrick in the hall of Mrs. Lordson's house, of how the girl had seemed changed to him in a way for which he could not then account. It was all over now, this dream and hope of his which could never be fulfilled; it was all a thing of the past which he had better blot out from his

memory for ever; his life gone by filled with the love of this girl could have no part with his future days.

Whilst he was still pondering over these things, with his head lowered and a look of sorrow on his frank fair face, the door softly opened, and Mrs. Stonex Stanning entered. Going up to him she gave him her hand, and opened the conversation with some general remarks about the weather. A dress of red brown shade fell in folds about her tall, graceful figure; around her neck and shoulders she had wound some black lace; a crimson rose lay on her breast. She looked pale to-day; her bright brown hair was brushed low upon her forehead, in her grey eyes there was a half wistful, anxious look that Marcus Phillips had never noticed in them before.

For the first time it now struck him

that the fact of his calling to ask her to request Lord Harrick to give back the "Beggar Maid" picture was a somewhat delicate situation; and the thought made the young artist feel nervous. He did not want or wish to tell her anything of Capri; he should not tell her that it was the fact of the girl's engagement to the viscount that made him anxious to have back the picture; he did not wish to mention her name in any way if he could avoid doing so. Mrs. Stonex Stanning would be sure to hear of Lord Harrick's approaching marriage sooner or later, and might then draw her own conclusions from the fact that he (Marcus Phillips) wished to possess the portrait; but he would not mention Capri's name to-day.

Mrs. Stonex Stanning asked him if he had lately been to Mr. Rossetti's studio, and commenced to detail to him the sub-

jects of some works in which that artist was then engaged. But while she spoke she was wondering why it was he had paid her so early a visit. She noticed that his replies to her were not always to the purpose, and were given in an absent-minded way that showed his mind was not engaged on the topic of their conversation.

“ You were so kind about my picture,” he commenced at last, when she had paused and the opportunity was given him to begin without seeming abruptness, “ that I feel great reluctance in giving you any additional trouble about it; and yet I fear I must, as it was through your hands I had the pleasure of receiving the offer and the cheque for it.”

Mrs. Stonex Stanning looked up at him quickly when he had commenced to speak; she wondered more than ever what he was about to say.

"It was really a pleasure to me," she answered, by way of helping him, for she saw that his words did not flow readily.

"And it will perhaps seem a whim, and may be a piece of injustice on my part, when I say that I am anxious to return the money and have the picture back."

He had now stated the object of his visit and felt much relieved.

"Have it back from Lord Harrick?" she said, somewhat astonished at his words.

"Yes, I am particularly desirous that he should not retain the picture."

Silence between them for a moment or two; then he added hurriedly,

"I would rather that anyone else than Lord Harrick had it."

When he had spoken he felt hot and confused and uncomfortable under Mrs. Stonex Stanning's quiet gaze.

She turned away her head as her eyes

met his ; but last night she had heard the rumour of Lord Harrick's engagement, and now she knew for a fact what she had merely suspected before, that Marcus Phillips loved the original of the " Beggar Maid " picture. Her face grew a shade paler ; she sighed under her breath.

It was true then that he loved this girl, and she who had given him her heart unsought, she must live a cold loveless life. Fate was hard upon her. She had given him the treasure of her love, and with indifferent eyes he had passed by unheeding her.

" I think it likely that Lord Harrick will not give back the picture under the circumstances."

She said the last words very softly and gently, taking it for granted at once that Marcus Phillips knew of Capri's engagement.

He felt that she understood him. He did not look at her immediately, and without raising his eyes continued,

"I shall be sorry to give you this trouble, and if you allow me I will write to Lord Harrick myself on the subject."

The idea of doing so had just struck him, and he gave voice to it quickly. She did not reply at once. He looked at her now and saw that her head was lowered and her clasped hands laid upon her knees.

He saw in that glance that she was both beautiful and graceful, more so than he had ever thought before.

"If you think it wise to have the picture back," she said slowly, laying a stress upon the first words, "I think it will perhaps be better for you to write to him."

"It may not be wise," he answered, "but it will be a satisfaction to me to have

the canvas, and I am glad you think I had better write to him myself."

"Not," she said quickly, "that I should think it any trouble to write. I would do anything I could to serve you."

The words escaped from her before she was aware of them.

"I do not doubt that," he said frankly, and he rose up to go and took her hand.

In that clasp he felt that she understood him fully.

"Must you go so soon?" she asked.

"I have called at an almost inexcusable hour, and I fear I may have disturbed you."

"I am quite disengaged," she replied softly, and he thought her tones invited him to stay. He sat down again.

She was loth that he should go so soon. She noted the change wrought in his appearance since she had seen him in her

rooms a night or two ago, saw that the look of frank joyousness was gone from his face, that sorrow looked out from his bright blue eyes, a sorrow that had no part with the usual expression of his fair sunny countenance.

She read the meaning of it all aright, and felt a strong desire to give him, if she might, some kind words that would lighten the burden of his present sorrow. Between them at this moment, though he scarcely suspected it, there was a strong bond of sympathy. They both suffered from that intense feeling of solitariness and pain with which unrequited affection afflicts; and in his trouble Mrs. Stonex Stanning felt as if she approached nearer to him than before.

Yet from the bottom of her heart she pitied him. Her love for him was so pure and true and unselfish that she would have

sacrificed her own hopes and chances of future bliss through life to see him happy. The mere fact of being in his presence brought her a strange feeling of restfulness, satisfaction, and pleasure.

The sun shone in brightly through the drawn blinds, the fresh fragrance of the flowers came into the room borne on the midday air.

"Do you intend leaving town," she asked him when he was again seated.

"Yes, I have made up my mind to go away somewhere and work hard for some time."

"It is what I was about to advise," she said, "a thorough change will serve you, hard work will do you much good."

"I feel that," he answered, "I must have my mind occupied; and town feels so hot and oppressive just now that I imagine I can scarcely breathe; the pavements seem

like red-hot ploughshares over which those martyrs to circumstance who cannot escape from the city must daily plod. I must leave."

"Brittany is very lovely in the autumn, and there are many parts of it which are yet sacred from the presence of Cook's excursionists. Do you know the country?"

"No, not in the least."

She looked at him now, and her soft grey eyes were full of sympathy and a feeling stronger than friendship. Marcus Phillips felt calmed and soothed under the influence of her gaze, and touched more by the tone of her voice than by the words she uttered, for the sound of a voice is oftentimes the true key-note of feeling.

"You should go to Brittany, the change of its quietness from town life would serve you much."

"I feel that absence from London for

some time would do me much service in many ways."

There was a pause just then. Mrs. Stonex Stanning felt that there was something she must say before they parted, yet the words refused to come. When most we want to express ourselves words fail us. Thoughts burn in the brain, desires rise in the heart; but the tongue is silent, and will not give them voice, and we are helpless and confused.

Marcus Phillips sat there as if held by some spell.

"The scenery in Brittany is very fine," she said; "it will be useful to you as a study; it always serves one to come face to face with Nature."

"I think it must."

"I know it does. The great mother teaches us so many things if we only have patience to listen to her voice, and

read her lessons aright. Nature is a great teacher, her ways are full of sweetness and peace."

The artist listened to her words that somehow brought him a balm and calmness which last night he thought it would take years, or at least months to produce.

Then she summoned courage to speak to him as she desired ; the words came at last to her lips ; her voice was soft, low, tremulous, and sweet as music, and had all the charm and influence of melody for him.

"Mr. Phillips," she commenced, "I shall not pretend to feel ignorant of a sorrow which has come to you."

He never started or moved, but sat there looking at her graceful head slightly bowed, watching the effort which the words cost her.

"I know that a grief has come to you, which perhaps shakes your faith in woman's friendship, and makes all the world seem a blank."

He did not speak; he felt his face grow hot and flushed.

"Such sorrows," she went on bravely, "when they have passed, make hearts all the stronger; life is rendered noble by endurance. Remember," she continued, with a tremulous sound in her voice, "that others have had to bear such sorrows before; to bear them patiently, bravely, mutely, unknown to the world."

"That is true," he said, speaking for the first time since she touched on this subject. "But I fear that, when sorrow comes to us, we imagine it is darker than ever before shadowed other hearts."

"That is true; I speak to you now because when one is young the weight of

a great grief seems to crush out all hope, and to make us believe that in suffering we are solitary."

"It does."

"I have known what such pain is," she said in a subdued voice, lowering her head till her lips almost touched the single crimson rose in her breast; a bright flush swept gradually over her face, and she lowered her eyes. "I speak to you now in ali sympathy."

"I thank you from my heart," Marcus Phillips said, for he felt her words were strong links that bound them closer yet in a bond of sympathy and mutual understanding. "I thank you from my heart ; believe me, I shall always remember what you have said."

He was deeply touched by her words. In a second a bright look came over her face and made it more soft and beautiful

than usual. Yet she quickly subdued her feelings and went on :

“ There are some natures that sorrow hardens and turns cruel and cynical, it acts as a blight ; there are others which it softens and subdues. Do not let the keenness of your disappointment make you lose faith in the friendship of women.”

“ Your words have saved me from that fate ; very little would have made me believe a woman’s heart nothing but a myth ; would have launched my life into a cold cruel sea of darkness and doubt and scepticism ; you have rescued me from this danger.”

He spoke quickly, as men are apt to do when the words bubble up hot from the heart, and something like tears shone in his honest blue eyes.

“ God bless you,” he said once under his breath, but she caught the words, and

remembered and repeated them to herself over and over again long afterwards.

Could he but know the wealth of love which lay in her heart for him ; could he but feel the tenderness which she yearned to show him ; could she but have told him that he, and he alone, was the one man on earth to whom she would gladly trust the keeping of her heart and honour, by whose side she would walk along the rugged ways of life even till death met them on the way.

But she dared not tell him this. Her lips were closed ; yet when her eyes looked into his he read the history of her heart in them plainer than words could speak it far, for words are weak and powerless to tell of feelings that sway, and passions that stir us deeply.

He had no doubt now that the nature of the woman before him was both true and

noble, that her affection was a sacred gift which deserved to be treasured and held as the most precious thing in life by the man to whom it was given. He thought of all this while the words of sympathy she had just spoken rang in his ears.

Had his affections been his to give he would have offered them to her, all unworthy though they might be of her acceptance ; but they had been offered to another, who had flung them away as worthless things in comparison with money and position. His heart was not yet quite his own ; though it had been rejected, yet it vainly, hopelessly, foolishly clung to the woman who had put it away from her for ever. Time would probably restore it to his keeping once more, but at present it was not his to give or take. It had gone long ago out of his keeping ; gone astray and got torn and bruised and wounded.

He sighed deeply as he thought of this, and wondered why it was there was so much sorrow and pain in the world. He had thought life fair and happy and bright but a little while ago, until this sorrow had fallen on him, which had seemed to open his eyes to the griefs and pains of others, and place him in direct unison with the miseries of existence.

There was no smile on his face as he rose up to say good-bye; his voice was suppressed and scarcely sounded like his own; the shadow of sorrow was yet in his eyes, but it had now a more softened expression.

“ You are a true and kind friend,” he said earnestly, holding out his hand. “ Believe me, I thank you for your words most heartily.”

“ Good-bye,” she said.

As she rose up the crimson rose lying at

her breast fell to the ground. He stooped and picked it up, but did not restore it to her.

“ May I keep it ? ” he said simply.

“ Yes.”

Then she gave him her hand ; it trembled a little as he pressed it ; in another second he had left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

NINE MONTHS AFTER.

NINE months came and went since Mrs. Stonex Stanning gave that reception at which Lord Harrick had proposed for the girl who in due time became his wife.

Society remained much the same. It is a stream which for ever and ever goes on in its broad, rippling flow, though men and women may come and go, and love, and marry, and sin, and sorrow, and die. It is ever the same. Onwards it rolls eternally with a musical, rippling sound,

and a bright, smooth surface that never hints at dark undercurrents, dangerous whirlpools, and dank, deadly weeds that have firm root in the slime below.

Nations may rise and fall, crowns be lost and won, empires be swept away, but society continues the even tenor of its course unmoved. What though its lions of last season have grown tame with the tameness of familiarity, that some of its most prominent leaders have gone to the antipodes, or the family mausoleum for an eternal rest, what though its pets have begun to bore, or have taken that slight step outside the pale which prevents their soiled hands ever being taken again in the pure clasp of its votaries ; yet strange lions are imported, new leaders step forward, and fresh pets present themselves, and so the wheel goes round and round and nothing is changed.

The same smiles even, though worn on different faces, meet you, bright eyes look pleasantly into yours as of yore, the same words greet you, the same musical murmur of sweet voices charged with pleasant messages falls on your ears. It is ever the same.

Nine months ago and Capri had become the bride of Richard, sixth Viscount Harwick, had stood by his side in the Chapel of Henry the Seventh in Westminster Abbey, where the ceremony had been performed by a bishop, assisted by canons and minor dignitaries, with all pomp and ceremony befitting the position she was to fill in the future. She heard the bishop's voice, low and solemn, asking her if she would take this man for her wedded husband to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony ?

She would.

Would she obey him, serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all other keep only unto him as long as both should live.

She would.

The low quivering voice of the bishop fell on her ears as if the words were not addressed to her, but to some one else in whom she was interested. It was like the voice in a dream, and sounded faint and far off, and had little meaning for her.

Was it after all a scene in a dream that would merely pass away in a minute or two and leave not a trace behind. It could not surely be a reality. All her movements were mechanical ; when she spoke it seemed as if some one else talked with her voice ; when she stretched forward her hand to receive on the fourth finger the ring that made her a wife and a viscountess, it

seemed as if some other will than her own prompted the action ; when the bridegroom took her hand in his to plight her his troth, it had no feeling of being clasped. It might have been a hand of clay or stone for all the pressure she experienced.

Then she felt herself kneeling down before the altar, yet acting mechanically rather than obeying any will of her own, and heard the prayer addressed to the eternal God, creator and preserver of all mankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life, to send a blessing on this man and woman His servants ; that as Isaac and Rebecca lived faithfully together, so these persons might surely perform and keep the vow and covenant betwixt them made (whereof the ring given and received was a token) and might ever remain in perfect love and faith together.

Amen.

Those whom God hath joined together
let no man put asunder. Amen.

She had looked wondrously handsome
enveloped in clouds of lace, though her
great dark eyes had a new gentleness in
their look which might almost be mistaken
for regret, though her olive-complexioned
face was much more pale than ever,
though there were semi-circles of blue
under the sweep of her long lashes, though
no smiles were on her lips.

It was a triumphal moment when the
ceremony was over. The sun shone in
through the magnificent window above the
altar, scattering bright patches of rich
colour all over the old oak stalls and the
carpeted floor and the pale marbles of the
cold monuments. The great organ rang
out with the notes of a wedding march that
swelled through the empty aisles, and sent

great waves of rejoicing sound through the dim chapels, and died away in melodious echoes along the vaulted roofs when the pianissimo parts sound hushed and soft, but full jubilant harmony still.

Capri had laid her hand upon her husband's arm and walked down through the grey chapels of the abbey, her head bowed over the great bouquet she held in her disengaged hand, her train of white satin and old lace sweeping the crimson carpet for yards behind, whilst the crowd on either side whispered and gave audible murmurs of admiration, and the joy-bells rang out loud and clear in the glorious sunshine of an August midday.

It was all, she thought, like the last chapter of a society novel, where the noble and happy bride, after almost insurmountable troubles, was united to her lover, who

had bravely borne so much anguish for her sake ; like the ending of a charming romance.

And yet it was all real, and though she was a bride she was neither noble nor—happy, and between her and her husband the course of courtship had run most placidly on, never as much as crossed by a shadow. It was all genuine, and not a *Family Herald* supplement romance, for all the bell-ringing, and white lace, and orange blossoms, and yellow sunshine.

No doubt the crowd of people who stared at her scrutinizingly envied her, and thought her as happy as could be, for she was surrounded by all the appendages and make-beliefs of happiness, and she looked wondrously beautiful.

But, though gratified, she felt far from happy, as she walked between the lines of

people waiting to see her in the Abbey yard, treading over the grave-stones of forgotten men and women, whose very names were obliterated from the flags laid above them by the traffic of passing feet; but who had once lived, and loved, and married, perhaps as she did, and slept, now that the restless fever of life was done with, for ever and for aye.

She almost wished herself like one of them this bright fair morning; wished that the whole tragedy or comedy—which-ever fate might make it—of her life was done with, that the heart-pangs, and the ceaseless yearnings within her, and the weariness had ceased, and that the time for restfulness and sleep had come.

The happy pair—as the newspapers called them, for newspapers are ever polite when you have plenty of money, and

never tread on the editorial corns, or want them to accept articles—went abroad for a prolonged honeymoon.

Paris, with its bright cloudless days, its brilliant nights, its gaiety, its vivaciousness, its grace, its beauty, its thousand delightful sights opened out before the eyes of Capri, Viscountess Harrick, as a child's Christmas dream—as a vision of Paradise itself.

It delighted her. In the gay capital she breathed an air more kindred to her than she had known since she had left that island washed by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, and smiling beneath the glory of a southern sky.

From Paris they had gone to Florence and Rome, where they wintered, and where the young viscountess became the fashion. Lord Harrick happened to know the English ambassador, having been at the same

college with him at Cambridge, from which period a feeble flame of friendship existed between them, which sprang and warmed into existence whenever they met, and lapsed when they parted.

This old college friendship, however, was of some service to Capri; in less than a week from her arrival in the Eternal City, she felt perfectly at home among the crowds of foreign princes, American millionaires, and English aristocracy whom she met at the receptions at the Palazzo Ciari, the ambassador's residence. The ambassador's wife became her fast friend.

Capri's appearance on this stage of society was a complete success; her rare beauty met with a homage it had never known before; the sight of her face in reception-rooms was the signal for a well-bred murmur of admiration, her presence

was looked on by hostesses as a favour, her entertainments were crowded. Her success was a surprise to herself; and a surprise that she welcomed because of the excitement it caused her. She enjoyed this new life thoroughly, its varieties, its seductions, its strangeness, kept her from thought; she had not time left for reflection; she had no leisure to look into her heart, the whirl of the excitement in which she lived drowned its voice. If she was not happy, because she could neither see nor hear, she was at least satisfied.

If one could only live without a heart, life would be in the main a very pleasant thing. That troublesome organ so often mars lives that would otherwise and without its interference prove pleasurable existences.

The new Viscountess Harrick felt this, and in the life she had begun she strove to

close up her heart with all its old remembrances, to set a seal of forgetfulness over it, to fix a clasp upon it that might open no more. In the present she succeeded, and was satisfied.

Yet she never felt quite secure ; the door which she strove to bar might burst open at any moment, and the thoughts and feelings of the old time come back to her. Memory sometimes, and when least expected, called out to her from the locked chamber with a voice that thrilled her, and which she hurriedly closed her ears to ; for the past was dead, and its ghost must lie quiet in its grave, and not startle her by word or vision. She told herself that she was happy ; she repeated it to herself over and over again with strange persistency.

She might in time—who knows, for we educate ourselves to credit strange fallacies sometimes, and to have faith in living lies—

have come to believe that she was indeed a very contented, happy woman, even though she was minus a heart, but for one little fact.

That was the appearance one day in Rome of her husband's friend, Guy Rutherford. Lord Harrick was glad to welcome him in a place where, though acquaintances were many, friends were few, and both he and his wife saw a great deal of him.

He knew the old city so thoroughly, all its objects of interest were quite familiar to him, he knew every picture worth seeing in its galleries, every statue in its sculptured halls, every shrine in its churches. His Italian was as fluent as his English, and he had learned and stored up in his memory many quaint old legends and curious lore connected with all that he pointed out. He was the most charming and delightful of guides. All that he said

concerning ruins and relics and objects of art came fresh to his lips, as if it had just then occurred to him, and had not been stored up in his recollection until it grew antiquated and pedantic.

His expressions were always happy, and depended entirely on the mood in which he was in at the time he spoke ; so that, hearing him repeat a legend, one was sure never to have the same reflections or ideas twice mixed up with his descriptions. Variety was perhaps his great charm. If he was bright and sparkling with wit to-day, to-morrow he was serious and philosophic. One half the day he talked of all things under Heaven and on earth ; the other half he was silent and *distract*, but in all his moods there was a fascination that made him dangerous to the peace of women's hearts. In him Capri felt a need was supplied to her which she had missed

since the evening she had said farewell to Marcus Phillips in his studio. She could scarcely, even to herself, describe the feeling of want which he satisfied. It was not love, certainly not; all that was over and done with.

In a subtle manner, which she but half understood, he read her thoughts before expressed, attuned himself to her moods, comprehended without a word from her her feelings, understood her as if her soul was reflected in his mind—understood her as no man or woman had done before. There was a secret affinity growing up between them which neither of them seemed to cultivate, but which yet day by day grew and strengthened.

They were friends, she told herself, nothing more. The world could never see or fathom the depth of this feeling which had shot up so suddenly, and now

bound them close together; interest to interest, heart to heart, soul to soul. It had taken but a few brief days to knit together this bond of friendship which they felt should last through life to death.

This common understanding lay deep in both their hearts, though no word or expression had ever passed between them to show that either was at all conscious of its existence. It was enough that they felt it. Our truest feelings need no outward expression, need no verbal interpretation. When hearts are in perfect unison, there is no need for words: intuition takes their place, and speaks with a subtle force and power that beggars all language.

To Capri it seemed as if she had never lived, in the full, broad sense of the word, until now, had never known the value of existence. This man, who was almost a stranger to her, was the counterpart of herself, with-

out which her existence had been robbed of half its value. All those years back she had lived on, ignorant of the force and depth of her life; she now woke to a sense of its vast importance, woke to see —what? This man's touch it was that had roused her to consciousness, that had waked her to a consciousness of her sordidness, selfishness, baseness, to show her that she had sold herself body and soul for a few golden coins and an empty sound affixed to her name. What did he think of her?

At the thought of how miserable and degraded she must look in his eyes, she cowered down her noble head and blushed in shame. She would have torn out her heart and trampled on it if she could. He alone perhaps of all her friends or acquaintances knew her, knew that she had made a barter of herself. She did not see the depth into which she had fallen

until he had come to her; and yet no words of his had ever hinted at the sacrifice she had made.

If he had but come in contact with her life before! There was a strength in him to which she responded, and which Marcus Phillips utterly lacked. For Guy Rutherford she felt that she could have made all sacrifices gladly, had she but known him before she had sworn love, honour, and obedience to Lord Harrick.

But she must not think of the past. She would gain strength to be true to her vows, and yet retain the friendship of this man who had become—it seemed to her—the necessity of her life.

It was only a friendship she entertained for him, nothing more, she told herself; and, satisfied with this assurance, she closed her eyes and suffered herself to walk through love's ways blindfolded.

Whilst the bandage was on her eyes life went on very smoothly and happily. The days went by as dreams, following each other in quick, pleasurable succession that scarcely gave her time to breathe. At times her pleasures rose to a pitch of feverish excitement that made her wonder if this present happiness would last. Her life was full of a strange sweet pleasure ; her beauty visibly heightened ; her gratitude to her husband increased in a manner which astonished him and placed him in a fool's paradise ; her gentleness to the outer world was the talk of Rome ; the charm of her manner was wonderful ; she was in love with life.

With society she had become a favourite. Even women liked her. She gave them no cause for jealousy or pain ; her beauty was too pronounced to admit of two opinions, and she had few rivals. At

all receptions given by her circle, she was looked for as the great attraction. And Capri enjoyed it all ; it was so new that it had not yet had time to weary her, and she accepted it all in good faith. It was all too delightful not to be true.

At length a little incident helped to raise the bandage which, in pity for herself, she had bound round her eyes so tightly, and showed her clearly for one brief moment the danger in which her friendship for Guy Rutherford placed her ; just as lightning with a sudden vivid blaze reveals clouds in the heavens which we did not picture before.

Capri had been to a masked ball, attended by Guy Rutherford ; Lord Harrick was dining that night at the ambassador's. The ball was given by the Princess Alantino, in a vast suite of rooms hung with purple velvet in her magnificent old

palace. It was a brilliant scene. Wax lights blazed in antique sconces of silver and gold that had belonged to ill-fated Borgias. Heraldic arms wrought in gold gleamed from the purple background of the velvet hangings, the varied colours and costumes of the guests created a bewildering effect. Capri's spirits were high, she danced much, and it was almost morning when she took Guy Rutherford's arm and got into the carriage.

He had scarcely spoken through the night; he had dauced with her but once; there was no coolness, no misunderstanding between them. She lay back in the carriage tired and rather pale; her mask lay on her knees. Suddenly she felt that he was looking at her with eyes that were luminous from the passion they expressed; in that instant her heart gave a wild

throb, and then was still as death, her breath ceased, a tide of blood swept with a mighty rush through the current of her veins.

In a moment he was beside her; before she could move, his arms were flung around her, and his lips met hers in one long kiss. A great joy filled her and shook her frame.

"Capri," he said, in a low hoarse voice, "I love you!"

There was no need to tell her that. She could never more rub the fact from her memory. In another instant she remembered all. She drew herself up, her eyes glanced at him once, and he released his arm.

That was all. She could not trust herself to speak just then. She feared her heart might betray her. Could she blame

him, chide him for the brief happiness he had given her? Could she call him traitor and thief, and load him with reproaches because for a second he had forgotten that she had sold herself to another man?

But in that second what had he not revealed to her? He had shown her that their friendship, which she had thought so fair and pleasant, was love—a love that the world would pronounce guilty; he had shown her the dark precipice on the yawning brink of which they had so fearlessly stood.

She covered her face with her hands, tears that scalded her eyes and burned her cheeks fell from her long lashes, her head swam, her heart beat violently.

They had almost reached home—her husband's home—before he spoke. Then

his voice was low and penitent, but as full of the old sweet music as of yore.

“ Will you forgive me ?”

“ On one condition.”

“ And that ?”

“ That you leave me to-morrow.”

“ Leave you ?”

She remembered afterwards that he spoke the words with almost a cry in his tones.

“ Ask me anything but that. If I leave you, I leave all happiness behind me.”

Never had his voice sounded more persuasively, never had it fallen with such dangerous sweetness on her ears.

A great sigh which she could not suppress escaped from her lips. She could not reply to him.

“ Let me stay here, near you.”

“No, no, no.”

Her voice rang out the words more in appeal than command.

“Then I go.”

Silence again.

She looked at him once. It might be, she thought, for the last time. The carriage-lamps shone in on his face, which was deadly pale. There was a strange light in his eyes which she feared. They were nearing the palazzo now where she lived.

“Let us say farewell.”

“Good-bye,” she said, stretching out her little, delicately-shaped hand, with its clusters of rings.

He took it and covered it with kisses, and pressed it once to his heart. Then the carriage stopped. He handed her out. She ran lightly up the steps; the shadow

of the great portico covered her from his gaze ; in another instant she had entered her husband's home.

CHAPTER V.

RECEIVING SOCIETY.

IN the first week of May, Lord Harrick and his young wife returned to town. They had come back for the commencement of the London season.

Harrick House, which had not thrown its doors open to London society for a quarter of a century, now became the centre of attraction ; the great luminary around which the moths of fashionable life hovered in numbers. For nine months past it had been in the hands of a famous decorative artist, who deigned to travel

from Paris once in every three months to see how his employés worked. The famous frescoos on the walls of the dining-room were restored ; the ceiling and doors of the great drawing-room were painted by a Roman, whom his disciples—for he, like all great men, had founded a school—declared a heaven-born genius ; the double flight of white Carrara marble steps leading from the hall was repolished ; the conservatory was filled with foreign plants ; the famous portraits by Sir Joshua Reynolds, Vandyck, and Lely, which had long been shrouded, were now uncovered and saw the light once more ; and carpets sent from Ispahan were laid upon the floor. The old house that had so long lain idle and dusty woke up to a scene that rivalled its splendours in the reign of the Regent. It was now a blaze of costly magnificence. No money had been spared by its lord to

make it worthy of his bride, and success was the grand result.

Within a week of her arrival in town the young Viscountess Harrick had been presented at a court drawing-room by her husband's maternal grandmother, the old Duchess of Dewshire, who resolved to do all she could for her kinsman towards remedying what she considered his foolish *mésalliance*.

The duchess was a pleasant old lady who had lived long enough in the world, and seen sufficient of its ways, to become tolerant of its oddities. Her grandson had made a false step, it was true ; it was wrong and unwise of him to have married a girl who was the daughter of no one in particular, and was the companion of a very vulgar American woman ; but her grace had known and heard of young men who had done far worse—young men who

had placed the honour of their house in the hands, and their coronets on the heads of women whose deeds society was supposed to be utterly ignorant of, and whose names were never mentioned to ears polite.

The Duchess of Dewshire was perfectly aware of the fact that her grandson had no brains worth speaking of, but had instead a certain stubborn will of his own which persons minus brains frequently possess. She had often felt uneasy as to his selection of a wife; she feared that he might give his name to the first woman who was shrewd enough to please his fancy, and felt disquieted as to whom that person might be. She would gladly have undertaken to arrange an alliance for him, but when she had hinted at the idea, he had not received it with too good a grace. Mistresses could be bought any day or

secured by intrigue, but he would select his own wife, he thought. His old kinswoman considered he was yet young, and though celibacy in a youth with seventy thousand a year was a target at which seventy thousand virgins might daily shoot, yet he might pass unscathed and end happily after all. It was a chance. Young men were sometimes wiser than one suspects when their matrimonial affairs are concerned. Some of them are sage in their generation as latter-day experience has shown. There was hope for him too in her grace's bosom.

But he had suddenly put an end to all these placid speculations by announcing one morning to the duchess his approaching marriage.

In her alarm her grace had pushed her wig all awry, let her pug-dog fall from her lap to the ground, and for the first time

in its life forgot to soothe its whine with a caress.

By-and-by, when Lord Harrick spoke very plainly of his determination to marry Capri, in a tone of sullenness—for sullenness sometimes does duty for strong will—and had explained that the girl was the daughter of a retired English officer in impoverished circumstances, the dear old duchess breathed more freely and thanked heaven (without having a very distinct idea of where or what kind of place it was) that after all her grandson's future bride was not some one who had just been some one else's wife, or an actress, or a *danseuse*, or anything else dreadful in that way.

When Capri, just before her marriage, had called to see her grace at her special invitation, she had liked the girl, and told her grandson that when they returned to

town she would present her at court and do all she could for her towards introducing her into society, and the old lady was faithful to her word.

She travelled from Scotland for the purpose of attending the first drawing-room of the season, and presenting the new viscountess. Her critical gaze was more than satisfied at Capri's self-conscious, cool and dignified bearing.

The young bride walked through the presence chamber as if she had been the intimate of courts all her life, and received the kiss of her sovereign with all the air and grace of a French marquise of the sixteenth century.

It was wonderful, the old Duchess of Dewshire thought. The bride of a noble earl, who was daughter to a marquis, had been presented immediately before Capri, and had blushed like a school-girl when

Her Majesty's lips brushed her cheek, and stumbled painfully over her train in backing from the royal presence. Capri had gone through the trying ceremony with a composure that might be almost mistaken for indifference.

The Viscountess Harrick had looked wondrously well in a robe of ivory-tinted silk, sewn with seed pearls, a ruff of rich old lace encircled her neck and bosom, her breast ablaze with diamonds, the famous heirlooms of the Harrick line.

Next afternoon the Duchess of Dewshire sat in Lady Harrick's magnificent carriage, which had been built by order by an American firm. The dark chocolate-coloured panels were luminous with the quarterings of the family arms; the servants were gorgeous in violet and silver liveries.

Round Rotten Row Lady Harrick swept

three times, then she ordered the carriage home, dropping her grace at her residence on her way. That night she was to dine with the duchess, to meet a cabinet minister who had just achieved a great victory for his party, a famous and enlightened bishop whose see lay in a great manufacturing town, a well-known historian and biographer, and a royal duke and duchess.

Lady Harrick had not been a week in town before her card-basket contained more than half the names in Foster's peerage. Her appearance had been even more successful in London than in Roman society.

Society, indeed, had been prepared to give her a recognition, to receive her in a way which would indicate the honour it conferred, and make her remember she was one new to its order and ways ; but

the new viscountess changed all that. She stood upon the dignity which her husband's rank conferred upon her, and received society when it came within her walls with a gracious self-possession that aggravated its temper to an astonishing degree.

At her first reception there were not half a dozen commoners present; in her invitations to those of her own rank she had been most select.

At length that night came when she was to be seen in the most trying position of hostess. She stood near the doorway, looking superb in a dress of pale green velvet, cut and shaped after some mediæval fashion; a net of dead gold caught her dark hair, and contrasted strangely with its russet under-tints; a wide belt of gold, curiously wrought with figures of knights and crusaders and quaint coats of arms

that had once belonged to Diane de Poictiers, clasped her waist.

Around where she stood flowers had been placed that now afforded her a background of dazzling colour ; the portrait of Anne, Viscountess Harrick, the beauty of the second Charles's court, hung on the wall above her, and the pale warm light of a hundred tapers falling upon her, softened the clear pale olive of her face, and turned the velvet of her clinging dress to many wondrous shades.

She stood there for long, like a sovereign receiving her subjects, according to them a gracious and courtly welcome. Her husband looked at her proudly, yet marvelling if she could be the girl whom he had first met in a dingy room on the third floor of a Euston Road lodging-house ; the girl to whom his gift of a paltry silver bangle had seemed so precious, who was a half-

wild Bohemian, the friend of a host of young authors, artists, and actors who came to learn fencing and sword exercise from her father.

Could it be the same who now received the choicest representatives of the first nobility in Europe with a calmness that had almost a haughtiness in its bearing; the same who now wore velvet and barbaric gold, and looked like a royal princess of the Middle Ages?

The idea began to dawn upon him that he had never known or half understood this woman whom he had elected to become his wife; a strange, vague feeling which he could not comprehend seemed for ever to come between them and keep them wide apart, when he most longed that their lives should be wholly united, when he most desired that her will and mind should be one with his, and his thoughts and

*When it does not worry poor little Dangifer
in such like aristocratic attire*

ways one with hers. They were not in perfect harmony, some subtle feeling, which he could not overcome nor understand, held them asunder. Would time level the barrier and bring them close together heart to heart?

In her manner she was ever gentle to him, obedient to his wishes, even thoughtful of what pleased him, he knew and felt she was grateful to him; but she was no longer the girl who had won him by her vivacious happy manner. The old merry light was now seen seldom in her dark eyes, the pleasant smile of past days was a stranger to her lips, her words were never now spoken with that satirical flippancy that had charmed him. With her change of circumstance and position she had assumed a staid and grave air, which, though perfectly natural, was not half so winning as her old ways.

Recently a passiveness to all things had fallen on her. With the eyes of a lover he had watched it steal upon her by degrees, watched the deadly languor, like some fatal disease, grow upon her, until it left her listless and dull, and set the seal of a great mental weariness on her face.

In vain, through the nine months of their married life, he had waited, and hoped, and watched for one look of affection—it never came.

One expression of tenderness, one impulse that would show she harboured at least some affection for him, would have repaid him and made him happy, but these never came, and as day after day, and month after month wore away, and to him his wife presented the same cold, placid exterior, his hopes of winning her love gradually faded. Yet who could tell what time might do for them? Time's

changes are wonderful. Those who have commenced married life in love have ended by hating each other; those who began it in indifference and misunderstanding have finished by loving each other above all others. Everyday existence showed such contradictions. It was strange, but true —human hearts are great mysteries.

There was no knowing what time might effect between Capri and himself. The gulf that somehow divided them might be filled up; they who stood now wide apart might gradually by some common love be drawn together in closest bonds. There was courage and some hope yet left in his heart.

So far as he was concerned time had not lessened his love, but rather strengthened it. The girl whose bright, happy face had gained his fancy was dearer to him—even though the change had come

upon her—as his wife. His affection for her, whose heart he was now conscious he had never won, strengthened with the knowledge that some lack of affinity parted them. If he only could overcome it and make her learn to love him !

He had gladly given her all he had : dignity, title, wealth, affection, and he would gladly give her all the world, if he possessed it, for the gift of her love in return. She was his, it was true ; his wife, and yet some stranger passing her door outside was almost as near to her as he her lord and master was. He felt this without being able to understand it. He would give half the years of his life that her feelings towards him were reversed. There was nothing on earth he desired so much as her love. His rank and money had bought her, he began to think, but her heart was not included in the bargain ;

she gave him herself, but she could not give him her love. And he had blindly thought that she cared for him, that their affection was mutual, but now he saw it was all on one side ; he had seen but the reflection of his own love in her, and mistook it for the genuine flame.

Had his marriage, after all, been a mistake ? It was a cruel thought that made him feel intensely miserable ; and yet, if he were free again, if the past was restored to him once more, would he act differently from what he had done ?

Looking at her now, surrounded by a group of the noblest men and women of their generation, watching her as she gracefully received the compliments of a foreign ambassador, and parried the *repartie* of a great statesman, acknowledging her proudly to be the fairest woman of the brilliant throng which filled his

drawing-room, he wished in his heart she was the simple merry Capri to whom he seemed nearer in the months gone by.

Every whim of hers had been gratified, every desire was fulfilled almost before she gave it expression, everything which he imagined could give her the faintest pleasure was promptly done. She thanked him, and strove to make him feel that she was grateful for all his kindness to her; but that something which he longed and waited for was lacking. Even if she would, she could not give him her love; it is not of that property which can be given and taken at mere will.

This night of her first reception the young Viscountess Harrick was very charming. Her olive face was pale, the rich masses of her hair were laid above her low, broad forehead, framed by her cap of dead gold threads, her dark eyes

were luminous and filled with a half sad expression that, whilst it puzzled the imagination, touched the heart.

Hours passed by, guests arrived and departed. Names known all over two continents were announced from servant to servant; up and down the great flight of Carrara marble steps, covered with cloth of imperial purple, men and women came and went whose names were the passports to Courts.

Lady Harrick welcomed and received their adieux with all the grace of one “to the manner born.” In her new *rôle* she was perfect; as a hostess she was delightful. An old peer who had known Lord Harrick since he was a boy, congratulated him on his happy marriage, and paid him a few graceful compliments, after the manner of the old school, on the felicity in his choice of such a wife.

Lord Harrick shook his hand very warmly, and was grateful to him, for he liked to be told he had done wisely ; it was re-assuring.

So the guests came and went. It was a brilliant scene—a distinguished gathering. It was long past midnight when those who had come to see the young viscountess in her new home departed, and the last carriage drove out of the courtyard, making a loud clatter in the quiet air of the early morning.

It was all over, husband and wife were alone once more. Capri stood on the hearth, her head bent, her forehead laid against the white marble of the chimney-piece, one arm hung listlessly by her side, the velvet of her train lay about her feet in massive folds.

“ You are tired, Capri,” her husband

said to her very gently, coming over and standing by her side.

"A little," she answered without moving her position.

"You have fatigued yourself with all these people."

"No, it is not that. The night is hot. I only feel it now."

"Do you know whom I have had a letter from this afternoon?" he remarked, by way of keeping up the conversation.

"No," she replied, now raising her head and looking at him.

"Guess?"

"Not my father?" she said quickly. "You have given him such a generous allowance that surely he could not think of asking you for more money—or of returning to England."

"No, it is not the captain; he only

writes once a quarter. Make another guess."

"I cannot," she said listlessly, letting her forehead once more touch the marble of the chimney-piece.

"I heard from Guy Rutherford."

A hot flush came into her face, her heart gave a great plunge and then beat rapidly against her breast, she never moved a muscle.

"I thought he was in Egypt," she remarked presently, and her voice had a low nervous tremor in its tones.

"Yes, when he left Rome so suddenly you remember—"

"I remember."

"He wrote to me to say he was going to Egypt for some years; he thought of settling down there he said. But he is a fellow one can never depend on, he is always tossing about the world. I knew

he would come back to England soon."

She had known it too—known it and feared it, and yet the sudden announcement of his returning came upon her like a shock. She had secretly and in spite of her better self longed to meet him once more, hoping to see him if only for a minute, and now, when her hopes and longings were about being fulfilled, she trembled at the prospect.

"He has said he is coming back?" she asked after some time. Her husband had said that he knew he would come, but it did not follow from that that he was really returning.

"Yes; he will probably be in town by the end of the week," he answered, yawning as he finished the sentence.

She raised her head. The great glare of the lights blazed before her eyes, the smell of the flowers grew suddenly oppres-

sive; she put her hand to her forehead wearily.

"I have a headache. I think I will go to bed. Mr. Rutherford comes to town—when did you say?"

"The end of this week. How tired you look, Capri; the room is too hot for you; you should not have stayed here."

He took her hand in his and felt that it was burning; and as he held it he could feel that it trembled.

"Yes," she answered, "I am tired and hot and nervous; the night has been a strain on me, I suppose. I shall go up to bed."

He took her arm playfully, walked across the room and opened the door for her.

"I am going down to my den to have a cigar," he said.

He let go her arm, and stood for a mo-

ment to watch the slight graceful figure, with its sweeping velvet skirts and dead gold ornaments, ascend the broad staircase leading to her rooms.

Then he went to the smoking-room, which he called his den, yawning on his way.

CHAPTER VI.

MY HEART IS SAIR.

A WEEK after Marcus Phillips paid that morning visit to Mrs. Stonex Stanning he left England, selecting Brittany, the place of which she had spoken, as the spot in which to spend his holiday.

Newton Marrix wrote a little paragraph, which went the round of the press, to the effect that the young artist had gone abroad for the purpose of studying the picturesque scenery of Brittany, and hinted that the public might look forward to

seeing some views of that country from his brush next season.

But Marcus Phillips just then thought very little of what press or public said or thought of him. All his ambitions lay dead within him: dead as the hopes for happiness that once strengthened and flourished in his heart. He felt exhausted mentally and physically, and recognized the fact that a total change was absolutely necessary to his condition. He left England with a strange absence of all regret at parting from friends and associations, left with a sense of weariness and defeat, and with a chillness of heart which it would take time to overcome. He had written courteously to Lord Harrick, asking the viscount to let him have back the picture of the "Beggar Maid," concerning which he had changed his mind. He

assigned no reasons for this request; he felt that he could give none.

Next day brought him an answer. Lord Harrick stated that if Marcus Phillips considered the picture of greater value than the price originally offered, he would, on being told the amount, enclose him a cheque for the sum, but that having purchased it he did not feel inclined to return it: so the artist could do no more.

When the Grosvenor Gallery closed on the 1st of August, the "Beggar Maid" picture was removed from its walls to Harrick House, where it was hung in my lady's boudoir, for Lord Harrick felt assured the sight of the picture would be certain to give his wife pleasure.

On the first night of their return he had taken her to the elegant little room, fur-

nished after the style of Madame de Pompadour, and showed her the picture—this vision of herself as she was when first he had known and loved her, and then waited patiently for some exclamation of pleasure from her lips. But no such sound fell on his ears. Capri remained silent, her eyes fixed thoughtfully on the canvas ; her face grew a shade paler, for the full memory of her farewell scene with the artist in the darkening studio that summer evening came back to her forcibly.

The whole scene returned to her. As she stood there she saw the strong man moved to tears and sobbing like a child; heard his voice cry out to her in warning against the life she had chosen, felt his arms around her, his lips pressed to hers, heard his entreaties to her to be true to her better self.

She had almost forgotten his love. It

had passed from her life to make room for a newer, and deeper, and stronger feeling than she had ever known or dreamed of before. A great light filled her heart which she dared not encourage, and beside the glory of whose rays all lesser flames dwindled down to insignificance.

As she looked at the canvas all colour left her cheek. Somehow the picture seemed a stern reproach to her. It spoke of hours and days that she might never know again ; of a past that was buried for ever and ever. This picture was not only a portrait of herself, it was far more : it was a mirror in itself of her past life.

The face of this “ Beggar Maid ” was truly that of the Bohemian Capri. There was a child-like sweetness in the expression of the eyes, a half merry, half serious look about the lips, a charm at once nameless and undefined about the face which

she had lost, and for which one sought now in vain in the face of the Viscountess Harrick. The countess was certainly a reflection of the young girl who had looked so anxiously forward to life; the girl of many moods who had dreamed strange dreams of what the future might hold for her; the untutored child at once wise and ignorant of the world and its ways. She saw all her past days reflected in the face before her as if it were a magic mirror, and she shrank back from its revelations. The eyes of that picture seemed to meet hers in a reproachful gaze; the face was like the ghost of her former self.

Something had separated her from that past as fully as if her soul had entered into the habitation of another body. There was a great blank between it and the present which she could not bridge over. On that memorable day

when she signed her name to the marriage registry, it seemed as if she had signed the death-warrant of her former self, the memories of which rose up at times before her like chilling spectres. It was bitter now to remember those dead days because of the sweets they had known, and which then she had not realised, but had held in her estimation as lighter than thistledown. The crown of sorrow was beginning to press itself around her brow. A year ago she would have laughed at the mention of it; she would have believed it impossible that it should ever wound her, now she realized its existence and felt its weight.

She stood by her husband's side on this the first night of their arrival in England, looking at the picture of the "Beggar Maid," whilst her face grew pallid and her hands clasped tightly one above the other.

"It was thoughtful of you to have it placed there," she said at last, in a cold tone that chilled him even whilst the words gratified him. "But, you see, it does not match the room quite. I think I will have it moved."

She could not bear to have it always facing her there; its haunting face would make her miserable. It must leave the boudoir.

Her husband was rather disappointed that the picture had not given her more pleasure, and sorry that she desired to have it moved from where he had had it placed. But he agreed with her in all things.

"Does it not suit the room?" he said. "I had not thought of that. Where shall we have it moved to, Capri?"

"To the morning-room. I think it will match it better."

She would not often see it there. The

morning-room was one she was not likely to use much.

“Very well,” he answered. “I shall give directions to have the change made.”

No more was said on the subject.

When Marcus Phillips left England he travelled for a week through Brittany, and having taken a fancy to the little commune of St. Jucet, settled down there. There was something peaceful and soothing in the sight which greeted him at every turn of the English Channel, blue almost as the Adriatic, and reflecting lights and shades, sunlight and clouds, like a vast mirror.

In the sea there is a sympathy with all moods. It can be gay with us in our periods of joyousness ; it can be mournful in our hours of sadness. The murmur of its voice speaks to us for ever of a thousand wonders held in its vastness, of a

thousand scenes wrought in its strength. Its great roar fills us with some sense of its own triumphs, its whispers touch our hearts indescribably, its boundless freedom appeals to us and fills us with a sense of wonder and joy.

Marcus Phillips lived in a fisherman's hut, resting on the broad ledge of a promontory that rose above the great patch of yellow sand upon the beach. In the foreground lay the wide bay, rippling with light all through the day, vast and mystic at night, and tremulous under the pale light of the stars it mirrored. The situation was magnificent, and filled him with delight. There was a healthy, vigorous influence in the lives of those around him that strengthened and served him to a greater degree than he could have believed possible.

He lived as simply as possible. He rose

early in the morning, had a breakfast of brown bread and milk, and then took his easel, and canvas, and camp-stool away to some sheltered spot on the headlands, or down to a cosy nook by the shore, where he worked till his sketch-book was covered, or his canvas began to glow with the beauty of the lights and colours that lay around him.

He seemed to catch the sparkle of the waves tossing under the rays of the yellow sun, and the white foam of the crests as they dashed themselves, with a vast voiceful melody, upon the shingle and sand ; to catch and transfix them with his brush to the canvas before him.

The homely life he led among the fishers of this little hamlet brought to the surface all that was best and truest in his nature ; here, face to face with Nature, he strove bravely to fight with the sorrow and for-

get the bitterness of the disappointment which had at first weighed him to the earth.

The recollection of that farewell scene in the studio grew gradually less painful and bitter to him, less vivid to his mind. Capri was the wife of another man now; through all the coming years she could never be nearer to him than a friend, and he strove to banish as far as he could all recollections of her and those days just gone by from his mind.

At first this was the great difficulty of his life.

Her face would come between him and his daily work over and over again, her eyes would look up into his from the canvas he worked at; on the faces of young girls he caught some passing expression which brought her before him with the vividness and reality of life. Her voice

sounded in his ear when no other voices were near him ; he often fancied he caught her very expressions ; he was haunted by her memory.

But all this gradually died away ; he exerted his will to banish her memory from his mind, he strove to close the book of his past life and fix on it the hasp of forgetfulness.

And then he felt that a great void had come into his life. His was a nature that required to love, that needed some life to cling to and care for, some one to strengthen and aid him in his efforts. It would be utterly impossible for him to go on leading a loveless, colourless existence ; he must have faith in some woman, he must love some other life.

Almost without being conscious of it his thoughts began to busy themselves about Mrs. Stonex Stanning. It was the

most natural thing in the world ; he had been told that she cared for him, and his own observation had given him evidence that such was the case. He must care for somebody ; one woman was beyond the pale of his affection, another slowly but surely began to engross it by degrees.

She it was who had been his best friend, had gained him the notice of the public through the invitation to exhibit in the Grosvenor Gallery. Her words were ever kind to him, and he felt that her thoughts were so likewise. He remembered all that she had said to him during their interview on the last day he had seen her ; thought of it again and again with an increasing interest and pleasure.

He began to think over her life ; to wonder vaguely if she were satisfied to live solitary without love and companionship through all her future days. Was she in her

heart content to live such a barren and sunless existence? Did her position and the society of her friends and acquaintances afford her all that she required? Was there no longing for a fuller, deeper life shared by another, within her heart?

He pondered over all these things quietly; speculated as to whether in her first marriage she had been wholly happy; as to whether she had given her husband the full measure of her love, or whether he had ever really touched her heart.

He had heard that Mr. Stanning was many years her senior, that she had married him before she was out of her teens, that he was rich and she was poor. There could not have been much love between them, he considered, and somehow he felt glad to think there had not been.

Then he thought of the two offers of

marriage which had been made her since her husband's death, and which she had refused. Her acceptance of one of them would have made her a peeress of Great Britain and Ireland, and if she had ambition she would have overlooked the blemishes of age and gout in the man who proposed to become her husband. But her second suitor had been young and handsome, and his name was famous as an artist, and he had loved her passionately, and yet she had refused him likewise.

Society had declared her cold, but Marcus Phillips knew that hers was a heart that could beat warmly for the man she cared for and loved. He felt assured of this. There was a gentleness and tenderness in her manner which could never spring from one who was naturally cold. Yet why had she not married again? He

felt his face grow hot as he remembered how she had looked into his eyes that day they parted ; he saw that they were full of tenderness for him ; he thought of her face expressive of gentleness and sympathy ; he recollects that her hand had trembled in his when she had said good-bye.

The remembrance of that hour came to him again and again. Her words returned to him also. She had said that sorrow made the heart stronger, that nature was rendered noble by endurance : and he felt that when she said the words she spoke from the experience of her life. Had she not almost told him so ? She had said that when one is young the weight of a great grief seems to crush out all hope, to make us believe that in suffering one is almost solitary, that she had

known what pain was, and she spoke to him in sympathy. All these words came back to him, and seemed to form a chain between them that bound them together. He began to comprehend that Mrs. Stonex Stanning had given him all the affections of her noble nature, he began to realize what a treasure such a voluntary gift must mean to the recipient.

When he had left her that day he had dried the crimson rose that fell from her breast, and had brought it with him, carefully preserved between the pages of his volume of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass." He kept it, he told himself, as a memento of her kindness, in gratitude and remembrance more than out of any other feeling. He believed so, for oftentimes we do not know our own hearts. He never fancied that the crimson rose, with

its dried and faded leaves, was the seed of a flower destined to spring up and sweeten their united lives.

CHAPTER VII.

HOME AGAIN.

MARCUS PHILLIPS worked in Brittany all through the long autumn; the fairest season of the four.

On the broad headlands the corn and colza turned to hues of deepest gold that glittered and rippled like a great amber sea in the full sunlight, and by-and-by fell beneath the quaint reaping-hooks of the peasants, and was bound in stout yellow sheaves by the strong brown hands of their womenkind.

Fields of late clover turned to dull red, the fruit hung ripe and mellow on the trees, the sea lost the smoothness of its glossy surface, and changed from deep blue to palest green, and flung up varach on the wide brown strand. The suns set in a blaze of crimson glory that streaked the westward sky with bars of fire long after the great day-god had withdrawn behind his screen of purple clouds.

The fishermen went out on the sea in rafts constructed from the timbers of wrecks, and bound together with coils of red-brown rope, to gather the sea-weed and heap it—in glittering green piles oozing with brine—far up on the beach, where the white crested waves might not reach it and drag it back once more to the fury and liberty of its native element.

All day the sounds of flails made a merry noise in the barns, dashing the grain

in golden showers from the sheaf; and at night the drone of the peasant's bagpipe made a pleasant monotonous murmur, save when it was drowned by the sound of the winds whistling far out on the sea, and sweeping over the land with a shrill cry that had something of the force and wildness of the coming winter in its sound.

Marcus Phillips was loth to quit the scene. Here he had grown strong mentally and physically. The place had given him back a peace which he had thought a little while ago it was impossible he should ever know again. Among the scenes by which he was surrounded the love of his art had returned to him with more than the old force and ardour; here the dawn of a new hope had begun to brighten the grey-hued horizon of his existence; a hope whose fulfilment might warm and make sweet and beautiful all his future days.

Not without regret did he leave the spot which had come to have many pleasant associations for him, a spot which he would always regard with kindly feelings.

At last, when all colour had faded from the landscape, when the fields were turned to sombre brown, and the trees grey and leafless, and the death of the year set in, he left for London once more, having made many vows to return annually.

A November fog hung thick and heavy over the city on the day that he returned once more to his old quarters in Fitzroy Street. How pleasantly familiar every spot seemed ; he was delighted to hear again the roar of traffic in the busy thoroughfares ; how thoroughly business-like everyone looked ; no one seemed to notice him, or to care in the least that he had returned once more, or to pay the faintest attention to the fact that he had

come back again strong in mind and health.

He had written to his landlady announcing his home-coming, and she was ready to welcome him when his cab drove up to the door, and tell him she was glad to see him back, and to hope that he was well and much benefited by his stay "abroad."

He felt grateful for her attentions, for it is always "sweet to know there is an eye," and a tongue, and a friendly hand to greet our coming.

There was a great fire in the studio that gave a cheerful, homely look to the room, and made it brighter than he imagined it was possible for it to appear. It was a good omen which he at once accepted for his future prospects.

In less than a week after his arrival he had given the finishing touches to one of

the best of his pictures painted at St. Jucet. The subject was merely some peasants on an old brown timber reef, gathering varach with long prongs dripping with brine. It was the result of his most careful work. The green and blue tints of the sea were wonderfully caught, these peasants with their rough, honest faces, in which the wind blew till it made them ruddy under the bronzed skin, were studies from life; the yellow colouring of the sky where the sun had sunk was a triumph of art.

Newton Marrix, when he saw it, declared that it was the best picture he had seen for years, that his friend had improved more than he could have expected, and that the committee at Burlington House would never think of rejecting such a picture if it was sent to them.

When it was placed in its frame the

artist took it with him to Mrs. Stonex Stanning's home in Kensington. How familiar the house looked ! He had thought of it many a time since, pictured to himself how it would look when he returned, and now it did not disappoint him, nothing was changed in his absence.

Mrs. Stonex Stanning was in the drawing-room. She had just returned from the South of France, where she had found time to write a novel, now in the hands of the publishers.

The artist laid down his picture at the door, and went eagerly forward to greet her. There was a welcome light in her grey eyes very pleasant for him to see, as she took his hand and asked him how he was.

In a few moments he was sitting near

her, talking with a quiet familiarity that almost surprised him.

"And you like Brittany?"

"It is a delightful place; and just the very spot that suited me."

"I thought it would."

"Your recommending me there adds a fresh obligation to those I already owe you."

"You owe me none," she answered him.

"I can scarcely tell you how it has served me, not alone physically but mentally. During the rest and quiet I enjoyed there I had time for thought and consideration, and I now see many things in a light far different from that in which I had seen them before."

"I am glad," she said calmly, her eyes meeting his in a quiet unflinching gaze that gave him courage to proceed.

“I have often thought and repeated to myself your words, ‘Sorrow makes the heart stronger.’”

“Have you found it so?”

“I have. I have conquered sorrow.”

“And are happy?” she asked quickly, and almost under her breath.

“I cannot answer you that question; a very little time shall decide it.”

Did she understand what he meant, he wondered. A bright look flashed into her eyes for a second, a rosy colour came upon her cheeks.

“Have you worked hard?” she said, slightly confused, and as if attempting to change the conversation.

He did not answer her immediately. Would he now ask her the question which should decide whether he was happy or not? He saw that she turned to him as

if expecting an answer, and with a smile he said,

“ You shall see.”

He went to the door and taking up his picture placed it on a chair, where a favourable light fell full upon it, bringing out its wonderful combinations of colours, and its delicate effects of shading.

“ It is delightful,” she said, going over to it and examining it carefully; “ it shows careful work and study.”

“ Will you do me the favour of accepting it ?”

He was standing near her as he spoke, and he saw a wave of colour sweep over her face, and a happy look come into her eyes.

She did not hesitate for a moment, but said simply,

“ I will accept it with pleasure; you

are very generous and kind to think of me."

"It is neither kindness nor generosity," he replied, still looking at her fixedly.

"Then it is thoughtful, you will allow that?"

"I painted it for you."

Once she looked at him quickly for a second, then lowered her eyes.

"You have taught me," he said, in a low voice that sounded full of music to her, "to be strong when strength was most needed, you have given me a sympathy which has caused a strange hope to spring up within me, you have given me your friendship, may I ask—may I dare to hope that you will give me something dearer than all these, something better, something which I have learned to regard as most noble and true—may

I ask you for this your affection—your love."

Her head was lowered and slightly turned from him ; he could see her neck changing from white to crimson. He hesitated for a moment, and then took her hand, and, with feelings more of affection and respect than passion, raised it to his lips.

She did not answer him yet, but remained quite quiet outwardly ; her head was still lowered, her bosom rose and fell gently ; her hand still rested in his.

"Have I asked too much ?" he asked her, in a low voice. "Have my hopes been too rash ? I know—I fear—I do not deserve what I have asked, but I offer you the devotion, the love of all my days."

She hesitated to speak no longer.

"Marcus," she said, turning her head slowly round, and letting her hand remain

still in his, "I have given you long ago all that you have asked me for to-day. I have given you the affection which no man before had ever wakened in me; my love went out to you unasked."

"Thank God," he replied, looking into her calm, grey eyes. "I have found the best and richest treasure man could possess."

He saw a happy smile break over her face, saw a blush dye the fairness of her cheeks.

"You will be mine," he said, and he kissed her hand once more.

His words were more precious to her than all the world besides; his love far above rubies. The great blessing of her life had come; after many barren years the flowers of happiness and peace were to brighten all her days. Yet before she

pledged herself as his wife she must speak of what lay in her thoughts.

“Marcus,” she said, calling him by his Christian name once more, “our hearts are not our own to give and take at will.” She spoke slowly and with a simple deliberation that gave force to her words. “I know this. If it were otherwise much sin and sorrow would be spared the world.” She hesitated a little, and then went on bravely, though the words cost her an effort. “Are you certain that your affection is quite free—that your heart is yours to give?”

“If it were not so,” he replied quickly, “do you think I should dare to offer it to you, do you imagine I would do you the injustice of asking for your love?”

“Do you think me ungenerous, unkind?” she said softly.

"No matter what happens, I can never do that."

"Thank you. I asked you this question because, you must remember, we do not always know ourselves."

"Perhaps not always; but in the quietness and peace of the life I have recently led, I have had time to look into my own heart and gauge it fully."

"That is well."

"And I have found that the passion which a few months ago filled my life has burned itself out and left scarce a trace behind. In its stead a purer, steadier, and yet deeper affection has sprung up that has changed and strengthened my life more than I can say."

When he spoke he looked frankly into her face, and she saw truth shining from his clear blue eyes. A great fount of happiness sprang up within her. Suddenly

all the world had grown fair and beautiful, and the future grew luminous with glad expectations.

“Having told you that my affection had gone out to you unsolicited,” she said, simply, “I will say also that a return of your love is the sweetest thing under heaven to me.”

“Ah! you have taught me to know my own heart; in loving you, I have come to the knowledge for the first time of what true and pure affection means.”

She had never heard more welcome words than those he spoke, she had never known the crown and bliss of existence till now, never realized before how happy love can render life. Yet the treasure which he offered her seemed in her eyes so great that she could scarcely realize it was hers really and wholly to accept. Her very love produced fear. Was his heart hers

in very deed, hers undividedly to have and hold through life till death. She could brook no partnership ; better that his love should never be offered to her than that she should hold but a divided sway over it. His avowal had made her whole life full of sunshine, and yet this shadow crept over it slowly and coldly.

She could not endure the thought that his proffered affection was but the outcome of gratitude for words of kindness she had given him in an hour of disappointment and sorrow ; she could not bear to think that this wealth of love he offered her, how sacred and dear heaven only knew, was but the reaction of a great depression which but a few months ago had rendered his days cold and desolate.

If his love was really hers to have and hold and enjoy till the end came, how happy would all existence become, into

what a paradise would earth turn, what new great joy would sweeten all her life !

Was it but some blessed dream, some illusion held out to her, some hope which she could never realise when this hour of her delirium had passed ? She sighed deeply, half from joy and fear. His words yet rang in her ears with tenderness and sank into her heart.

She must strengthen herself, she must put his love to the test, it would be better for both of them hereafter.

“Do you doubt me ?” he asked, a little reproachfully, she thought.

“No ; I know you believe all that you say.”

“My love for you is the purest and noblest I have known. Your words, your actions, your life have all inspired me with an affection that could not be otherwise than great and true.”

“I do not doubt your words ; they are the most welcome I have ever heard from man’s lips.” She paused a moment, as if to gain strength and courage, and then went on firmly. “My heart is yours, shall be yours till death. If in three months time you repeat to me the words you have spoken to-day, then I shall become your wife.”

“That is but a small sacrifice to make for such a prize,” he answered, “though I am afraid I shall find the time terribly long.”

“I will teach you patience.”

“It is a hard lesson, but with such a mistress, what might not one learn—Felice.”

He added her name to his sentence, as if by an after-thought ; how musical and sweet it sounded ; he could not help,

for the life of him, repeating it once more.

“ Felice.”

“ Yes,” she replied with a pleased happy look.

“ In these three months my love shall grow and strengthen with a threefold power,” he said, looking at her, and smiling into her face, and thinking never had she seemed so fair. Her calm grey eyes were raised to his, and he saw the glad light of a new happiness in them which stirred him deeply.

“ I shall count the days till then. You will put me to no further test?” he asked.

“ No,” she replied quickly.

“ I fear my patience would not last.”

She laughed softly, and her laughter was like music.

“ And at the end of three months?”

“I am yours.”

She cast down her eyes, the pink blush came once more like a soft glow upon her cheeks. He did not hesitate a moment, but raised his lips to hers and kissed her once.

CHAPTER VIII.

"IF THEY DON'T LIVE HAPPY."

FIVE brief months have passed away since that foggy day on which Marcus Phillips had returned from Brittany. It was now April, and early spring came once more and changed the face of the earth, making her fresh and fair in all men's sight again. The green had come on the trees and brightened the hedgerows, the early primroses opened their yellow leaves to the hot sunshine, daisies were in the wide, verdant fields, the chirp of birds sounded

softly in the air ; nature had once more burst the bonds of death, and her resurrection was heralded with gladness all over the earth.

At the end of the three months' probation to which Marcus Phillips had to submit, Mrs. Stonex Stanning promised to become his wife. The date of their marriage was fixed for April.

Society received a shock from which it did not recover for nine days when it heard the news. It had made up its mind that Mrs. Stonex Stanning was cold and impassionate, and that she would never marry again, and here, contrary to all its theories and beliefs, she was going to take for a husband this young artist, whose name no one had ever heard of until last year, when he exhibited his "Beggar Maid" picture. Moreover, he

was penniless, society soon discovered, and she had five thousand a year. It was strange altogether, this fancy of hers for this fair-haired, blue-eyed young man quite unknown to fame. But odd fancies did strike women now and then. Society does not like to feel disappointed, and was inclined at first to resent Mrs. Stonex Stanning's choice of a husband.

She had refused a marquis and a well-known painter, and had now consented to marry this young artist. It was true that the marquis was old and had the gout, and had had two wives already, and wore a wig, and took snuff, but these are all small and insignificant trifles weighed in the balance of a title, and Mrs. Stonex Stanning in refusing his suit had certainly proved herself wanting in taste and judgment.

Then the other suitor was a man who had made his name, and his name in return made some thousands of pounds annually for him. He had left England because his offer had been declined, and why she had refused him society could not tell; it only shook its head over her eccentricities.

People occasionally were foolish enough to believe in hearts and affections and all that sort of thing, and to make fools of themselves now and then by marrying for what they stupidly called love: and of course they paid for it by-and-by, because love, of course, was all sentimental talk and depended on the imagination; it had no reality whatsoever. Yet it was a diversion to watch the courses of such people. Their acts of folly were amusing to look on at; like a comedy played in a West

End drawing-room, instead of on a public stage.

It was droll.

Then the interest in the comedy might deepen by-and-by ; it frequently did, when the lovers grew tired of each other, as lovers of course always did.

"And are always sure to do, my dear," said Lady Everfair.

Perhaps a vein of tragedy might run as an undercurrent through the lives of those ridiculous enough to have faith in hearts and believe that love existed now-a-days.

As a sentiment love was well enough, and very good amusement occasionally to sigh over and play at when one had nothing else to do. It saved one from being bored very often, and under its imaginary influence one could say graceful things, and in return have sweet little words whispered

back in one's ear, words light as air that meant nothing at all in particular and were never intended to convey any serious meaning; but which were very pretty and pleasant in themselves, and destined to be forgotten completely the next hour or the next day, when one's fan was put aside, and the rose which had been kissed and given with a little sigh had fallen to pieces or been flung out of the window.

Yes, sentiment was all well enough, but as for love, that demanded sacrifices and made people—especially young people who knew no better—terribly in earnest with each other. That was always unsafe, too pronounced, and indeed scarcely good taste, unless conducted with delicate tact and grace.

However, early in April Marcus Phillips and Mrs. Stonex Stanning were made man

and wife. The five months previous to their marriage had been a very happy period for both of them; and though the artist did count the days as he had promised, yet he found they fled by very quickly, for scarce one of them passed but he saw the woman he loved. When he worked it was under her inspiration; on all he did he had her opinions and suggestions. Already their lives had begun to blend, and when at last the sacred tie of husband and wife bound them, their happiness was complete.

When, late in May, she who had been Mrs. Stonex Stanning returned to town as Mrs. Marcus Phillips, society felt inclined to overlook the eccentricity of her choice in a partner for life, and desired to take her to that organ which did its duty for a heart.

She had always been agreeable, her home

had been the centre of attraction, she was a pattern hostess, she had ever succeeded in amusing and pleasing her guests by the continual variety which the representatives of the aristocracies of birth and genius presented, and her manners had a charm that was irresistible.

Altogether society was inclined to forgive her the disappointment she had caused it; it even hoped she was happy, and then gave a deep sigh as if it knew full well that hope was vain.

To her first reception the whole London world came as of yore. Again Bohemia was there to a man, and Bohemia's wife and sister to a woman. They were all geniuses and all very happy, and they amused Lady Everfair immensely; indeed so pleased was she with one of them who sat next her, and told her who everyone was, that she declared them quite delight-

ful people, and hinted playfully that she would become one of them if she were only young enough.

On overhearing which remark, Newton Marrix gave her to understand that he considered her little past eighteen, and that if she would become Bohemia's fair queen, Bohemia's children would serve her more fondly and loyally than ever sovereign had been served before, for homage would be given to her not from duty but love.

At which pretty speech Lady Everfair smiled delightedly. She had first striven to frown severely at the young author's deliberate compliments, by lowering her handsomely-shaped brows—works of art in themselves.

Of course Mrs. W. Achilles Lordson was present, and as usual had been accompanied by Newton Marrix, who every day had grown more indispensable to her.

The good lady was decked with diamonds that blazed and glittered all over her ample person, and lay on the coils of her dark hair; her costume, too, was highly coloured, and though her general appearance was effective, yet a disappointment which she had received that morning left its shadow on her still.

In the *Morning Post* Mrs. W. Achilles Lordson had read the announcement that Lady Harrick had given a reception, and with bated breath read the long list of the guests' names. There were three duchesses and one duke, one marchioness, seven countesses, six earls, and the wives of many barons and baronets, together with some foreign princes. And she, Mrs. W. Achilles Lordson, had never been asked. Here was an assemblage among whom it would have been her greatest delight to

have moved. She had pictured to herself that when Capri returned she would be her constant guest and dearest friend; she would receive those who called on the young viscountess as if they were her own visitors, but now she saw there was an end to all those pleasant speculations.

She had called on Capri once since her return, and had found her kind and polite, but somewhat cold and reserved, and Lady Harrick had never returned her visit. Mrs. Lordson was beginning to see that a barrier existed between them which her late companion was in no way willing to remove. This last slight—as she called it—of Capri's showed her that she was to expect no friendship from the girl to whom she had been so generous.

The world in general, and Capri in particular, was ungrateful, Mrs. W. Achilles

Lordson told Newton Marrix that day, and ingratitude is never a pleasant thing to encounter: and the reflection of this annoyance dimmed the good woman's delight to-night in Mrs. Marcus Phillips's drawing-room.

However, under the pleasant influences around her, by-and-by her brow began to clear, and the indignation which all day she had been feeling, to evaporate. She congratulated the bride and bridegroom warmly, and began to think they were a very contented pair, and vaguely to wonder if it were yet too late for her to enter the married state again.

When the good woman came to the conclusion that her host and hostess were mutually blissful, she was quite correct.

Mrs. Marcus Phillips was happy with a happiness of which her whole life had been barren, and for which she had craved

all her days. It appeared to her now as if her whole existence had lain cold and dormant, and waste, and this new love was the sun that had risen bright and glorious to wake her to a light never before realized, to a fruitage never before known.

Into the artist's life had come a calm sense of felicity, a knowledge that some great treasure had been given to him of which he felt himself scarce worthy. Day by day revealed to him some new traits in the woman who had become his wife, which showed to him more and more the value of the love she had freely given to him. He looked forward to the future as he had never before done; he had ambitions still, not for himself, but for her to whom he had given his name; that name he would do his best to give to fame. In the present his whole life was bright with joy that reflected itself on all things; he

rested in the certainty of a perfect and mutual love. For him the present was full of peace, the future radiant with hope. This was true happiness.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. LORDSON'S TRIUMPH.

THE early summer months came and went, the London season advanced; town had never been so full, presentations had never been so numerous, court drawing-rooms had never been so brilliant or well attended to the memory of the oldest dowager.

For these three months Harrick House had thrown wide its doors to the cream of London society. It was far easier to gain an entry to a Drawing-room at St. James's

Palace than an invitation to a dinner, ball, concert, or reception given by the new viscountess. People angled, and plotted, and smiled, and manœuvred for invitations; but Capri Viscountess Harrick had commenced life with a high hand, and it amused her to watch the anxiety of people seeking to gain admission within her doors who had formerly been prepared to patronize her graciously; it amused her, but never moved her to grant their desires.

The entertainments at Harrick House were most exclusive; indeed the more exclusive they became, the harder the uninvited sought for admission. Mrs. W. Achilles Lordson was fully aware of that fact; she had set down Capri as an ingrate, she had despaired of ever setting her foot within Harrick House by invita-

tion, when one day the long looked-for, but now unexpected invitation came. The favour of Mrs. Lordson's presence was requested at a concert to commence at eleven o'clock on a certain Wednesday night, when a royal duke was to play a violin solo.

The prospect of such an honour almost deprived the good woman of breath. She laid down the card in her ample lap, clasped her hands, and threw back her head with a proud and happy gesture. The moment of her victory had come at last; she was to be received within the walls of Harrick House, she was to hear a royal duke play a fiddle, she was to be surrounded probably by duchesses, and marchionesses, and "nobles of high degree." Would she wear her diamonds or her rubies? they were as fine as any duchess

could have. Would Monsieur Worth be able to build a costume for her in time? She must telegraph to Paris at once and ask him; but then it had best be written in French. Where was Newton Marrix? He must do that for her. She would telegraph for him first.

As she stood up, the envelope on her lap tumbled to the ground, and a little note which she had not before seen fell out. She sat down again hurriedly, and read it over two or three times. It contained a few unceremonious lines from Capri, commencing "My dear Mrs. Lordson," asking her and Newton Marrix to come and dine with her on the evening of the concert. The dinner would be quite private, Lady Harrick added, the only other guest would be a friend of Lord Harrick's, whom she believed Mrs. Lord-

had previously met, Mr. Guy Rutherford.

Mrs. Lordson was delighted, and her conscience smote her for having thought for a moment that her dear Capri was ungrateful or forgetful. Then she read the letter over once more. This time she noted that the dinner was to be quiet and private, and she did not feel so pleased at that. After all, a duke would not take her down to dinner, it would only be Lord Harrick, and she felt a little disappointed. However, she consoled herself by remembering that at the concert the music-room would be surely filled by those so favoured by providence as to have their names in the peerage and baronetage, on whom she might gaze unabashed. It was a glorious prospect which made her happy for days. She was astonished rather that Newton Marrix took the fact of his invitation so

coolly; it took a little from her enthusiasm.

The night of the dinner and concert was one which she never forgot, and whose anniversary she ever afterwards religiously kept. Capri received her most kindly, and with a show of friendship which quite touched Mrs. Lordson's heart and made her keenly feel the depravity of that organ which had censured the viscountess as ungrateful.

The dinner was a very cosy, pleasant little meal. Capri talked a good deal with Newton Marrix. Guy Rutherford paid a great deal of attention to Mrs. Lordson. Lord Harrick said little to anyone.

But then the concert, at which, besides a royal performer, a *prima donna* was to assist. It was the proudest night in the

life of this daughter of the Great Republic when she trailed her violet velvet skirts down the great, white marble steps, leaning on the arm of a noble marquis as she descended to the large music-room off the hall. In leaving the drawing-room she had rubbed shoulders with the Duchess of Dewshire and actually survived that ennobling event.

"La," she said to Newton Marrix in a whisper, "to think of it all, and see the prince and the old duchess, and the Marquis of Mountebank and all the great people talking and laughing with Capri as if she were one of themselves."

"So she is," said Newton Marrix.

"It is wonderful," said the American lady from behind her large fan, which she afterwards wielded so vigorously as to cause a strong current of wind to blow the

author's long hair about in an artistic, dishevelled manner.

"Then she is the handsomest woman in London," continued Newton Marrix, "and for splendour her entertainments are scarcely equalled by royalty."

"And to think that I first brought her out," she exclaimed, for she would fain have some of Capri's honour and glory reflected—no matter how faintly—on herself.

"Ah," said the young man, "it was your mission."

Mrs. W. Achilles Lordson looked solemn, and said it was.

This conversation occurred during a short interlude that took place in the concert. There was a great hum and murmur of voices all through the room, a faint rustling of the delicately-perfumed

programmes. The Marquis of Mountebank had fallen asleep; his mouth was open, and his wig slightly disarranged, a pinch of snuff yet rested between his jewelled fingers, but for all that he looked every inch a marquis, Mrs. Lordson thought, and was a very delightful man sleeping or waking; though in the latter condition he was apt to grin idiotically at nothing in particular, and stuttered over words that were generally senseless.

Suddenly silence fell upon the room as if an angel had passed through the air; it was only, however, the royal duke who had stepped on to the platform, fiddle in hand, and was now bowing very courteously. Then the solo commenced, and, after about five minutes, ended in a long-drawn note, and was applauded with a heartiness that made the foreign *prima donna*, who

was to sing immediately afterwards, wonder exceedingly.

The last item in the programme was set down as a song for the hostess. It was a little air which Padre Pallamari had written, and published with the five pounds which Lord Harrick had asked Capri to give him long ago. Capri had written to ask her old friend to come and play for her guests; but he had steadily declined. It was a pathetic little ballad, "If we had never met, Love," and as she sang the words, feelings of power and pathos expressed themselves with a force of which she was scarcely conscious. Indeed, she half forgot the audience before her, and as she ended saw them through a mist that, in spite of her, gathered in her luminous dark eyes.

And so it was all over; the night had

been a great success, royalty was charmed, society was delighted, Mrs. Lordson was in ecstasies. The royal carriage with its crimson liveries drove away, the other guests slowly left. The Duchess of Dewshire congratulated Capri, and kissed her on either cheek affectionately as she departed. The Marquis of Mountebank saw Mrs. Lordson to her brougham, and made her a foolish little speech which she never understood, but which she afterwards came to think meant to imply a compliment.

It was all over, and Capri was standing alone in the drawing-room, listening to the wheels of the last carriage as it rolled noisily away, when Guy Rutherford entered.

"I have just come to say good night," he said, putting out his hand, "and to thank you for your song." Then he added,

in an altered tone, “ If we had never met, Love !” and hummed a bar or two of the air she had sung.

“ Good night,” she said.

Her hand trembled a little in his grasp.

CHAPTER X.

LOVE CONQUERS.

IT was a morning early in August. Capri was in the small drawing-room, lying on a lounge near the window, one hand lay under her head, an open book rested on her knees, her eyes looked vacantly out on the garden beyond, bright in the yellow sunshine, rich in its glow of colour and blossom.

But to-day she heeded neither flowers nor sunshine; she felt depressed and

weighed down with a weariness that filled her with its wasting bitterness. Life had become to her tame and colourless and void. The excitement which buoyed her up whilst her guests surrounded her, the knowledge of her success, was an alleviation from the dull torpor that had now become her normal state.

There was something missing from her days without which all her youthfulness lost its brightness, all the sweetness of life lost its flavour.

She had won the game for which she played, won almost without a struggle; the things for which she had longed and hoped had come to her; but in return something which was dearer than all she had gained, dearer than she had ever imagined anything could be to her, was beyond her present reach.

All existence lay bleak and colourless before her, without a love which it was forbidden her to possess. If only she could have affection for the husband who had given her so much, raised her from poverty and dependence, cared for her far more than she deserved; if in return fate had made her love him, she would have been happy and glad; but that was impossible. He was almost a stranger to her yet; though she had been his wife twelve months, there was no affinity between them, but rather a void over which neither of them could reach. She wondered if she would have been happy, or at least contented, if she had never seen Guy Rutherford. "If we had never met, Love!" she said to herself over and over again. If they never had.

As it was he filled all her life. The

touch of his hand burned her, his words thrilled her with a strange sense of happiness, his mere look subdued her; in his presence she was content, satisfied. What strange power did he hold over her? She felt unable to shake it off; he fascinated her; in his absence she longed for him, when he stood before her a feverish delight took possession of her. How was it all to end, she asked herself; would she ever gain strength to conquer her heart and become a true wife to the man to whom she had sworn love, honour, and obedience?

At times she hated herself; the knowledge that she had sold herself for position and wealth filled her with bitterness; she regarded herself as a slave bound in hateful bondage, who must be subject to her master in all things and have no will beyond his

desires. She had voluntarily placed a shackle round her neck which only death could undo ; she was degraded in her own sight. Her heart cried out against a servitude which with her own free will she had accepted ; all her old Bohemian precepts, all her hereditary tendencies of the singer of "*La Scala*," came back to her and made her call out for liberty. She struck her heart against the bars of a stern uncompromising fate which must for ever imprison her. Would the restlessness ever leave her veins ? Would these yearnings for a love that must not be hers ever be stilled ? Would the fever burn itself out, and the pain be stifled, and her rebellious heart know rest, if not happiness ? Would death come and bring her peace ? Now she was tempest-tost the storm of a great passion was in her breast, and raged

through her veins ; life had become insupportable.

If only they had never met !

Since his return to town he had been with her much. The friendship and association begun in Rome was continued in London as if a break had never occurred, as if that scene in the carriage on their way home from the Princess Alantino's masked ball had never happened, as if he had never told her that he loved her.

Naturally and quietly he fell into the same habits with regard to her and her husband. He was continually their guest ; he accompanied them in their rides ; they met in society frequently. During the season, and since his arrival in town, there was scarcely a day that Capri did not see him, and every day his presence became dearer and more dangerous to her, though

no words passed his lips in addressing her that the world might not have heard.

But Guy Rutherford was a man who had little need of words to express himself. When he spoke to her there was a tenderness in his voice, a look in his eyes that told her more than all words could have said. Did he know, she wondered, the power which his mere presence held over her, did he know that her heart longed and ached for his love? Ah, God! if she were but free to give him the wealth of her affection, but free to follow the dictates of her heart!

She lay on the sofa there as these thoughts passed through her mind, lay heedless that the world outside was steeped in the golden sunshine of this early August morning, and was full of innocent gladness. She only thought of her own

life, and of the shadow that darkened and made it miserable.

Suddenly a little tap sounded at the door; she knew it was not the knock of one of the servants. In a moment she started to her feet, her heart gave one quick throb, then by an effort she calmed herself and sat down once more.

The knock sounded again. Would she bid him enter? What was this strange, wild feeling that made her heart bound and sent the blood rushing to her head? Why did this fierce struggle rage within her? She would end it at once.

"Come in," she said, in a low, hoarse voice that was unlike her own.

The door opened softly, she heard a light footstep fall on the carpet, but she did not turn round her head.

"You will excuse me calling so early,"

Guy Rutherford said, in the most conventional manner possible.

His coolness nerved her, his presence calmed her. Yet she made no answer.

"I called to see Lord Harrick," he continued, "but I find he is out; so I thought I would do myself the pleasure of seeing you instead."

"He has gone to his club," she said, giving her hand to her visitor.

"So early," he replied, as if he were not aware it was Lord Harrick's invariable custom.

"He always goes out in the morning."

"I have not interrupted you, I hope," he asked, sitting down on a low ottoman near her.

"No," she said, striving to be calm, "I have not been reading."

She turned away her head, and looked out on the garden, where the sunlight was dancing on the leaves of a green tree that stood in the centre.

Neither spoke for some time, neither moved.

“Do you intend riding this morning?”

“No, it is much too hot.”

Her eyes were now fixed on the blaze of mingled colours which the flower-beds presented : they would not meet his.

He gave a short, quick sigh as if impatient, got up and walked to the opposite window. Capri made neither sign nor motion, but remained as if she had suddenly turned to marble. Interiorly her heart was all afame.

Guy Rutherford once more crossed the room, coming over to where she sat. On his way he passed a little table on which

some books lay ; he took up the first volume that came to his hand ; it was Henry Carey's translation of Dante's " Vision of Hell," illustrated by Gustave Doré.

A new thought seemed to strike him. Opening the book, he carried it over, and seated himself once more on the low ottoman by her side. In bending his head over the volume, his crisp brown hair touched her hand ; it sent a thrill through her which she could not suppress.

" Do you like the illustrations ?" he asked calmly.

It was a most commonplace question, but conversations that commence with trifles sometimes end in tragedies.

" Some of them," she answered, scarcely giving his question a thought, for she felt it had little connection with the main current of his mind.

“ As a draughtsman he is superior.”

“ Perhaps.”

“ Do you like his larger pictures?”

“ The ‘Entry into Jerusalem’ is very fine.”

“ Look at this engraving of ‘Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta;’ to my mind, it is the best thing Doré has ever done.”

He held the book open before her, and with some feeling akin to pity in her eyes she looked at the figures of the murdered lovers “ together coming which seem so light before the wind.”

“ It is very beautiful,” she said quietly.

There was a tone in her voice which touched him indescribably.

“ Let me read the passage for you,” he said. “ I will commence at Francesca’s speech.”

Capri lowered her head. Then he began slowly. His voice was full of music and feeling.

“If thou are bent to know the primal root
From whence our love gat being, I will do
As one who weeps and tells his tale. One day
For our delight we read of Lancelot,
How his love thrall'd. Alone we were, and no
Suspicion near us. Oft times by that reading
Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue
Fled from our altered cheek. But at one point
Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,
The wished smile so rapturously kiss'd
By one so deep in love, then he, who ne'er
From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kissed. The book and writer both
Were love's purveyors. In its leaves that day
We read no more.”

His voice was full of melody, and it had a strong fascination for her ear. She listened to him reading the old story of an unforgotten love of a by-gone age, and the words burned themselves into her heart.

He paused when he had finished, and she did not dare to break the silence. The lines had touched her strangely. He closed the book and laid it down beside him on the floor. Then with a rapid change of manner, with a voice that was tremulous from eagerness, he spoke.

“Capri, what has happened that you are so cold to me to-day?”

The colour left her olive cheeks, a sun-ray falling through the window changed her hair to dusky gold, a hot fierce light passed into her eyes, yet she did not speak.

He laid one hand on her knees softly, almost caressingly; he looked into her face, now quite pale. She did not look at him, but turned away her eyes. A great struggle raged hot and furious in her heart, but she made no outward sign.

Once more he spoke ; this time hurriedly, and his voice was hoarse and passionate.

“ Will you not speak to me ? Why are you so cold ? What have I done ? ”

“ Am I cold ? ” she asked, the words falling from her lips in measured syllables.

“ Can you ask me ? ”

“ Why, oh ! why have you returned ? ” she said, the words breaking from her lips like a cry.

“ I could not live without you.”

Into her dark eyes a warm light came, a sigh low and soft broke from her lips, then the light died suddenly away again ; she was struggling yet.

“ I could not stay away,” he went on ; “ I tried hard, God knows ; I fought with myself bravely, but my love for you conquered. Even if your presence meant death to me, I felt that I must see you.”

Still silence on her part. How her heart beat against her breast in the tumult that beset her.

"Capri," he said very softly, "do not be cruel; if you knew how valueless, how hateful all things became to me without you, how weary life grew, you would not ask me why I had returned. Your love has become to me the only thing I value in all the world."

He looked into her face; the passionate light in his eyes almost scorched her; she could not look at him, but covered her face with her hand; her fingers quivered and twitched convulsively. He took one hand in his and drew it towards him very gently; and when he spoke again, his voice had in it the strength of a great resolution.

"Capri, Fate has been cruel and unjust in giving you to a man who cannot love

you as I do. Will you be cruel also? Will you not let me stay near you, where I may see you from time to time, may hear your voice, may touch your hand?"

He raised her fingers to his lips as he spoke and kissed them fervently; he saw her bosom rise and fall quickly, watched the hot blood surge into her face, and then heard her cry out in a voice half choked by sobs,

"Oh, leave me; if you love me as you say, leave me for ever!"

"Capri, is it no happiness to you that I remain? If my presence is a pain——"

"Oh, no, no!" she sobbed out, "it is not that, but you must not remain; leave England, Europe, and forget, as I will strive to forget, that we ever met."

"I at least can never do that."

His lips were set; into his blue eyes the

wild light of passion came once more, his face had an expression that was almost fierce. She did not dare raise her eyes.

“Capri,” he said presently, in a quick husky voice, for the passion raging within scorched his throat and made his veins burn as if liquid fire ran in them. “Why should two souls be parted? Why should you and I cast ourselves in that hell of torture which separation would certainly mean? Why should we let a cruel fate sever us for ever—only think of for ever—when our hearts are already one?”

She listened to him now with eyes staring and wild; the hand that held his opened and shut convulsively on his fingers.

“You cannot know, Capri, what existence is to me without you ; you cannot tell

how you have grown into my life as never a woman's love has grown before; you cannot feel how I worship you."

Only a deep quick sob interrupted him.

"For a year of life with you, I would barter the remainder of my days, I would endure an eternity of torture, an endless hell: only tell me that you love me."

"O God!" she cried out, "I am lost."

Her voice had the sound of a great despair, like the wail of a soul that is damned.

"I love you dearer than life!" she broke out, in a passionate wildness that awed him by the strength of its very fierceness. "When I first saw you I feared you, for my heart went out to you even then, and when later ~~on~~ I met you in Rome, I knew that my soul stood in peril. I strove to be

true and strong, strove to overcome the love for you that sprang up in my heart, but I strove in vain."

"My love! my love!" he said.

"I cannot live and endure the strife that has filled me. My whole life is a mockery, a miserable waste, a wrong to the man who has given me his name. The temptation of your love has been too strong for me—take me body and soul!"

She reached out her arms to him yearningly; he clasped her to his breast.

"My love! my darling! you are mine! Nothing can separate us now through life till death!"

A shudder ran through her frame; she laid her head upon his shoulder; he raised it between his hands and kissed her on the lips.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE BRINK.

THAT night Mademoiselle Sarah Bernhardt was to play at the Gaiety Theatre. The piece in which she was to appear was "La Dame aux Camélias."

Lady Harrick had had a box engaged for her some weeks previous, and had looked forward to this night. Only that morning at breakfast she had reminded her husband that this was the date on which they had arranged to visit the

Gaiety ; he was to accompany her ; it had been all decided.

Just before luncheon, however, Lord Harrick came home, and met Guy Rutherford coming quickly down the stairs.

“Ah ! Rutherford,” said the viscount, “you are the very man I wanted.”

His friend started at first, but took the hand Lord Harrick held out to him.

“You will stay to luncheon, will you not ?”

“No, thanks. I fear I cannot. The fact is it is later than I thought. I have an appointment at two o’clock ; the time slipped by me unnoticed as I was speaking to Lady Harrick.”

“I hope you told her so.”

“I did not.”

“Don’t you pay compliments to ladies ?”

“Sometimes.”

Lord Harrick led the way to the dining-room as he spoke; he was in excellent humour.

"Do stay to luncheon, Guy," he asked again.

"I cannot to-day. I am rather in a hurry. I called in to see you, but found you were out," he said carelessly, "but I found Lady Harrick in the drawing-room, and I have outstayed my time. I have to see my banker by two o'clock."

"Well, if you can't stay, I'll tell you how you can oblige me to-night."

"To-night?"

"Yes; I promised Capri to go with her to the Gaiety, to see—I forget what."

"*'La Dame aux Camélias'?*"

"Exactly. She wants to see Sarah Bernhardt playing."

"Well?"

"Well, I have just met Saintsbury. He says he expects a division to-night in the House, and he makes a point of my coming and voting on his side. It's deucedly unpleasant, you know; and I don't want to have Capri disappointed."

"Of course not," said Guy Rutherford, looking away from his friend's face.

"Don't you see, I must go to the House. I must positively, and if you will be so good, Rutherford, as to take Capri to the Gaiety, you will oblige me very much."

Guy Rutherford was silent, then a sudden thought struck him.

"With pleasure," he said quickly. "I shall take her with pleasure."

"Thanks, old man."

Unknown to either of them, she had entered the dining-room at that moment.

She started on seeing Guy Rutherford there talking to her husband. Her face was perfectly colourless; in her eyes was a happy light, which in those latter days was new to them. Lord Harrick turned round and saw her.

"Capri," he said, "I am awfully sorry, you know, but Saintsbury, whom I met to-day, makes a point of my going down to the House to-night—expects a division and that sort of thing, so I have asked Rutherford to go with you to the Gaiety instead of me."

Was there a fate in this? she asked herself. Seeing she was expected to make some answer, she said,

"You cannot come then?"

"No. I am awfully sorry, you know, but when Saintsbury put it in the way he did, I must really go."

"When will the division take place?" asked Guy Rutherford.

"It is impossible to say. It may come on at nine or ten, or not perhaps until one o'clock in the morning."

Capri kept her eyes down and made no remark.

"Will you not dine with us, Rutherford?" Lord Harrick asked his friend, "that is if you are not already engaged. We dine an hour earlier to-night, on account of the theatre, do we not, Capri? Come at half-past seven, will you?"

"Thanks," he replied. "I have already promised to dine out."

He was determined not to break bread at the table of this man, on whom he was about to inflict a great wrong.

"I shall be here at half-past eight," he said, turning his back to Lord Harrick

that he might not see his face, and looking straight at Capri.

Their eyes met once, but that short glance was sufficient. She understood all that he would say.

“Good morning once more,” he said to her, holding out his hand, and pressing her fingers in his hot palm.

Then he said lightly,

“I wish I could interest myself in politics, Harrick.”

“You know I care very little about them.”

“You ought. They afford a pastime without which Englishmen would bore each other to death; an occupation for which they should thank the gods.”

He walked to the dining-room door as he spoke; seemingly he did not see Lord

Herrick's hand outstretched as he passed him.

"Au revoir," he said, waving his hand and smiling.

A servant opened the door, and he passed out.

All that day Capri lay in her boudoir; she had, she said, a violent headache, and left word that she was not at home to any callers; she must not be interrupted. In the afternoon the carriage came round to the door as usual; she sent the horses back to the stable, and that evening she was absent from the Row for the first time since the commencement of the season. She could not tell how the weary time passed, each hour seemed a month, the day an eternity. If only this summer day was dead and the night had come; if only the cruel suspense, the slow fever

that consumed her were ended. The little clock on the chimney-piece ticked, and the silvery chimes of the quarters rang until she felt almost distracted. Surely never did hours creep by at so slow a pace before, never did time drag on so miserably.

It was different she supposed to others ; it was a glorious summer day, and the world was steeped in sunshine and full of happiness ; out in the country it was very peaceful and merry, and there were probably pale-faced holiday-makers from the city, and innocent children, and lovers who thought the hours fled all too quickly, and sighed to think that the night would come so soon. But for her there was a fever in her veins of a great impatience, and she could find no rest nor peace until the irrevocable step was taken.

She lay quite still on the sofa of that pretty boudoir, her body exhausted, her mind wildly confused. All things seemed strange and bewildering since the moment when she had cried out that she was lost. The sense of a great change was upon her, a weight of which she could not relieve herself lay upon her heart, her temples throbbed feverishly, her head was hot and dizzy, her pulse rapid and uneven, her lips hot and parched, her nerves unstrung.

She started at every sound, she could scarcely think with coherence, she could not read, she could only lie there waiting for the slow hours to go by ; she thought it was six when the little clock chimed four with a sweet, silvery sound that left a musical echo behind.

Would the day never end ?

The sun glared in through the closely-drawn blinds, with something like a triumph, she thought, in its brilliancy that mocked her; the light hurt her, and she closed her eyes. Then the stillness of the house on this afternoon startled her; presently she leaned up on her elbow to listen to noises and the tones of voices which she imagined she heard. No, the place was quiet as death.

After a while she lay back again ; then she thought her strength deserted her, a great fear fell upon her. What if she grew ill, and was too unwell to go to the Gaiety that night? She held her breath. What if she were suffering already from a fever! What if a violent illness seized her and death came?

She was about to pray that the silent, white-winged death-angel would come and

still her heart for ever, but her courage failed her, and she remembered that she dared not raise her voice in prayer. She closed her eyes, and though the heat was oppressive she shuddered suddenly. If she died what should become of him? Would he live on after her, in time forget her, grow happy perhaps and speak the same words to some other woman that he had spoken to her that day, kiss her lips as he had kissed hers, press her to his heart as she had been pressed in the fervour of a wild love? Oh, no, no, surely that could not be, that could never happen; she had given herself to him body and soul that morning, and he was hers for ever and ever. She would rise from her death-bed to follow him if needs be, nothing should part them; she would be happy even in hell if he were by her.

Would the day never end?

She turned from side to side exhausted and weary. The hateful sunlight still streamed into the room through the rose-hued curtains ; it was yet but five minutes past four o'clock. How were the slow hours to pass? Every minute she grew more hot and weary, and after a while her mind began to wander. She lost all control over her thoughts ; she was but half conscious now. Did she dream? She stood in Marcus Phillips's studio ; the young artist was there too, and his blue eyes looked pleadingly into hers. How happy he was seeing her there before him, a welcome smile was on his lips, he spoke to her, but she could not catch his words, yet she knew that they entreated her not to leave him. She loved him now ; she was happy in his presence ; the look

in his frank face filled her with delight.

Suddenly his features altered to those of Guy Rutherford, but she was not surprised either at the change or at seeing him in the artist's studio. He looked into her face, and his eyes scorched her with cruel light like rays of fire ; she thought to escape, yet she could not move hand or foot, but stood there helplessly and trembling before him. All her love had turned to fear. She watched him take up some brushes that lay upon the floor and commence to paint her portrait, but the only colours he used were red and black that stood out in glaring contrast to each other from the canvas.

In a minute the portrait was finished ; something like a crimson robe covered the figure and wrapped it round and round like flames ; the eyes started from their

sockets, wild and haggard with the light of madness in them. Suddenly it all faded, and again on the canvas a face appeared, shadow-like at first, that presently grew and grew until she recognized her own features once more, but ah, what a change ! It was pallid like the face of one long dead, there was no light in the wide open eyes, there was a scared expression on the features ; the skin had a bluish tint, the hair hung limp and dishevelled.

She flung out her hands in despair, for a terrible fear that she could not understand was upon her. Then she sank down, down, down, and in a moment she was a child once more, happy and innocent, without a shadow of sin or care upon her, a merry child with dark hair that turned to burnished gold in the warm sunlight.

It was a summer morning, and she stood

outside the fisherman's hut that was her home. What a wonderful cabin it was, too, inside ! There were bright-coloured pictures of the saints hanging on the rough walls ; an old wooden crucifix black with time hung at the far end. She could see the sad downcast face of the figure, and its meek head crowned with a little wreath of thorns, see the drops of red paint to represent blood on the pierced hands and feet, which she now raised her innocent, childish lips to kiss. In a corner was a shrine where a tiny lamp burned feebly ; the red-brown fishing nets hung upon the walls with coils of rope and old baskets, and over the fire a pot of soup for the morning meal simmered slowly.

Outside there was a great blaze of sunlight, the boats lay high and dry upon the yellow beach, fishermen in blue shirts that

numbered many patches, and red caps, were spreading fishing-tackle in the sun, the cry of quails and the musical splash of the waves beating on the shore filled the air with a monotonous sweet sound ; out beyond the sea stretched wide and blue, sparkling under the rays of the sun. She ran down upon the beach, where the sand looked dry and scorching, but it sank under her, the waves rose with a mighty roar and rushed in upon her, she cried aloud for help, and the face of one she knew bent over her and dragged her to him. It was Guy Rutherford.

With a great sob she awoke, and found her maid had just entered to announce that it was time to dress for dinner. For a few moments she could hardly realize that her dream was not a reality ; the handsome boudoir, the face of her maid

looking at her with curious eyes, were more unreal to her than the scenes which had just passed before her. Then in a second she remembered all.

When the gong sounded that day for dinner Capri came down wearing a dress of a deep creamy hue. She had no ornaments, not even the engagement ring that had once belonged to Mary Stuart; a crimson geranium was fixed just above her heart. Her face was pale; her dark hair was coiled round her small head; a shadow rested under her eyes; her manner had the nervous bearing of suppressed excitement.

Before reaching the dining-room she hesitated a moment, then went towards the morning-room, turned the handle, entered and closed the door softly behind her. She crossed the room swiftly until

she came to the spot where the “Beggar Maid” picture hung. She looked up at the face as if reading it in a new light, looked at the sweet, wondering expression of the great dark eyes, and the happy, almost childlike smile playing about the lips.

Involuntarily she looked into an opposite mirror, and in one swift glance saw the contrast between her past and present self. She was yet as handsome as her picture, perhaps even more so, but some old nameless charm had left her which the face of the “Beggar Maid” retained.

What was it that had gone?

She could scarcely tell; a great weariness had now grown to rest like a shadow on her face, a craving look in her eyes, as if she sought in vain for what she needed.

In the “Beggar Maid’s” face a happy

brightness shone, and innocence beamed in the eyes.

“And it was once so like me,” she said; then added, half under her breath, “Poor Marc!”

She stepped lightly on to a chair that stood under the picture.

“Good-bye, Capri,” she said to the portrait softly, whilst a low sob gathered in her throat. “Good-bye to you and all the old days. Good-bye.”

A mist of tears came into her eyes and almost blinded her. She raised herself on her toes, and, putting her lips to those of the picture, kissed them, as if the portrait of her old self were a living thing.

“Good-bye for ever.”

She got down from the chair, walked across the room quickly and down the white marble steps to the dining-room.

She was alone with her husband "for the last time," she said to herself as she sat down. Lord Harrick was in a state bordering on excitement; for though he cared but little for politics, the prospect of the expected division pleased him; he began to think that after all politics would not prove a bad pastime; they would just be as interesting to him as billiards or *ecarté*. He spoke to Capri about the bill which was then passing through the Upper House, and what Saintsbury had told him, and what the *Telegraph* had said concerning it that morning.

To all of which she listened patiently, without making any response save an occasional yes or no. He did not notice that her face was almost colourless as a marble statue that time had mellowed and softened, and that she trembled when he spoke

to her. All he felt was that she was quieter than usual, and very gentle when she replied to him. He remembered afterwards the strange look that was in her eyes when he happened to glance up at her suddenly.

Before dinner was quite over Guy Rutherford came in ; if his manner was at all changed it was that he talked more and seemed in better spirits than usual.

“ Have I come too soon after all ? ” he asked, addressing Lord Harrick. “ I fear I have, though I thought I should be too late. I got away rather sooner than I anticipated, and I came along in a hurry.”

“ Not a bit too soon,” said Lord Harrick. “ Why, it is half-past eight,” he added, taking out his watch.

“ So it is,” replied Rutherford.

"I have promised to be in the House by nine."

"You have plenty of time yet."

"I shall drive down with you as far as Charing Cross, Capri, and then have a cigar and walk over to Westminster."

Without answering she rose from the table.

"Are you ready, Lady Harrick?" said Guy Rutherford.

"Quite ready," she replied, though a choking sensation gathered at her throat that almost prevented her getting out the words.

The brougham pulled up at Charing-Cross, and Lord Harrick got out. Then the horses trotted briskly along the Strand. When Capri and Guy Rutherford were alone, he bent forward to her and said,

“Mine at last.”

“For ever.”

The first act of “*La Dame aux Camélias*” was over, and the second half way through by the time Lady Harrick entered her box. All eyes were fixed on the stage. Armand Duval was telling Marguerite Gauthier of his passion. Then Sarah Bernhardt’s voice fell on the audience like music, and her promises of fidelity to her lover rang through the silent house with a fervour that touched women’s hearts and made men hold their breaths. The great actress was at her best to-night: the audience was held fascinated by that nameless power which the world calls genius.

Soon came the end of the scene where the Comte de Giray’s name is announced, and Marguerite after a moment’s hesitation, during which the whole house was

hushed to silence, falls into the arms of Armand Duval amidst a storm of applause.

The act-drop descended, then Guy Rutherford looked at Capri once : her face was colourless. She had not spoken to him since they entered the house. He drew the curtain half-way across the box, and taking her hand bent down over her as she sat there in the half light.

“My darling, are you ready?”

A smile broke over her face ; she raised her eyes to his.

“Let us go,” he said, almost in a whisper.

She rose up without a word and left.

Half an hour afterwards, and they were journeying down to Cornwall fast as a Great Northern express train could carry them.

CHAPTER XII.

LOST.

IT was the close of an August day. A fresh wind blew in sudden gusts from the sea, ruffling the water far beyond, and sweeping fitfully over the Cornwall coast. The day just dead had been close and oppressive, the atmosphere heavy, the sky cloudy and threatening, but now that evening had come the sun broke from the clouds in a burst of sudden glory and then sank down into the sea in a great blaze of yellow light. The scene was imposing.

The ocean turned to deeper green ; far out the crests of the waves rose white and angry ; clouds like flames of a deep orange hue burned low down in the westward sky ; the wind rose higher and sighed across the land.

At a window of a farm-house, built far in from the cliffs, two figures stood watching the sunset. The position of the house commanded a sweeping view of the sea along the beach, and far out until sea-line and sky-line met and mingled in a purple haze beyond. It afforded also a view of the cliffs for a wide distance, rising dark and steep, their grey nakedness covered with scant vegetation.

“ How glorious the sky looks ; the yellow clouds almost seem to touch the sea ; and look ! there is a red bar of light now, See how it glows like fire ! ”

“ Yes. I think it means we are going

to have a rough night. The sea is rising rapidly," replied Guy Rutherford.

"Shall we have a storm?"

"I believe so," he answered, watching the sky, and then looking out to sea, where the waves rose higher and higher every moment.

They could hear the roar of the sea, and the waves dashing themselves against the cliffs and rushing in upon the beach below.

"I feel afraid of the sea when it cries out like that," said Capri; "it seems to me strong and merciless, so terrible and relentless in its passion."

"It is like the human heart, Capri. Don't you think so?"

"I never have before," she answered, gazing out before her thoughtfully.

"I often compare the ocean to a heart.

One hour it is fair, and calm, and happy, then the first breath of a tempest sweeps over it and ruffles its surface, a stronger blast, and it rises with the wildness of a passion which must exhaust itself before it can be appeased."

His voice died away in silence. Twilight fell upon the land, the orange and crimson clouds faded in the west, a pale moon rose in the troubled sky, the wind swept fitfully in from the sea with ever-increasing vigour.

"You will see the sea at its best tonight," said Guy Rutherford, breaking the silence that followed his last words.

"I am afraid of it," she answered. "You know I am not a coward, but this coming storm fills me with dread."

In the twilight he saw that her face had a white, scared look.

“Afraid whilst I am near you,” he said, drawing her to him closely and tenderly.

She put her hand into his and said,

“Never whilst you are near.”

“My darling !”

They stood at the window, still looking out at the gathering storm. There was no light in the room; Capri had laid her head, as if for protection, on Guy Rutherford’s breast, his arm was round her.

Outside on the headlands they could hear the fishermen shouting to each other, and presently Guy could discern a group of them as they stood near the edge of the cliffs holding on their hats and pointing out to the distance that looked to him a vast space of grey vapour. The moon grew brighter by degrees, but continually got lost among the great masses of dark, jagged clouds that hurried past in a drear endless procession.

The sea turned from green to black save where the silver light occasionally struck the waves far out, making their crests sparkle as they rose in their strength, and then fell back again into chasms of purple space ; the shriek of sea-birds was borne on the dark winds ; the storm gathered strength and power with every moment ; the sea grew majestic, and the land lay hushed and subdued.

Night had come now. Suddenly all traces of the moon were lost behind heavy banks of clouds ; land and sea were alike wrapped in darkness, and the darkness brought with it a sense of mystery and undefined dread. Far out the winds shrieked ; the waters were lifted up, and in rage dashed against the grey, impregnable cliffs that flung them back again into the black seething waste.

“ The sea has gone mad to-night,” said

Guy Rutherford ; “ if the moon comes out by-and-by and lights it up it will be a glorious scene.”

Capri made no reply ; he could not see her face, which had grown white even to the lips, but he felt her clinging closer to him, one hand that he held in his trembled as if from fright.

“ You are nervous to-night, Capri.”

“ Perhaps I am. The day has been so hot and the atmosphere so heavy that I have felt depressed since morning.”

“ My little woman !”

She put up her lips to his face and kissed him.

“ Shall we go out and look at the sea ? If we are not both blown away the breeze will do us good.”

“ Guy, do not leave me !” She caught his arm in both her hands.

"Leave you! Certainly not. You are not well, Capri. We shall leave this place next week and go abroad. The air is too strong for you."

"It's not the air, only I am nervous, as you say; and promise me, dear, that you will not leave me to-night."

"You excite yourself unnecessarily."

"Promise me," she persisted.

"I promise."

The words fell from his lips slowly and distinctly. Capri seemed relieved; and she breathed more freely. Just then a dull, heavy sound was heard as if from the sea.

"It's thunder," she said in an alarmed tone, drawing suddenly back from the window a step or two, and linking her hands tighter around his arm.

Guy Rutherford did not speak, he stood there waiting, listening. In a few seconds

the same dull, booming sound fell upon their ears once more.

“There is another clap.”

“No,” he replied, “it is a signal gun. Some ship is in danger, probably off the coast.”

Silence again in the room; then came a blast of wind that shook the house as it swept over the land, and in the lull that followed the signal gun again was heard.

“The ship cannot be far off,” he said.

Capri clasped her hands round his arm tighter yet; she did not speak.

“I must go out and try to see what it is. You stay here and I shall come back presently.”

“Your promise!” and then she added, “We will both go out.”

“Very well, come if you are not afraid of being blown away.”

"I will have no fear of any kind while you are with me."

They went out. Two or three men were hurriedly making their way down a narrow path that led from the cliffs to the beach. They were shouting to each other with their hands to their mouths, but the wind was so high that Guy Rutherford could not catch what they were saying.

He followed with Capri hanging on his arm. She had tied a handkerchief tightly over her head, and put on a heavy Ulster coat that prevented her dress from flapping about. As they went along they could hear the minute gun, seemingly sounding quite near them, and again further off. The wind swept in from the sea in a fierce gale that prevented them at times from taking a step in advance.

Down on the beach there was a group

of fishermen and their wives and boys, sheltering themselves under an overhanging cliff. The men had on their oilskins, their hats were tied on their heads with handkerchiefs, covering their ears and fastened under their chins; some of them carried lanterns in their hands, that cast a dull yellow glare on the darkness, and brought the outlines of the figures into semi-relief. The women's dresses blew around them, rustling and crackling in the gale. The boys shouted to each other excitedly, but their voices were almost lost in the mighty roar of the sea, and the dull grating sound of the stones and pebbles being sucked back into the waters by the retreating waves.

"What is it?" asked Guy Rutherford, when at last he was able to make his way towards the little crowd that looked with

white faces out towards blackness beyond.

"A ship, sir," one of the fishermen said. "A ship; and she's drifting, as well as we can make out, on these reefs in front of us. It's one of the worst spots on the coast."

The man's rugged face was fixed and almost stern; and there was an unflinching light in his eyes. Wrecks had but little terror for him, he had seen them year after year since he was a boy; had seen human lives struggle vainly with the might of the tempest, and sink helplessly into the blackness of night. It was their fate.

Guy Rutherford could not see the ship. He must wait until the moon escaped from behind the mass of dense clouds.

"She has no chance," said an old man. "The wind is blowing her fair on to the reefs."

One of the women groaned.

"How far does the reef run?"

"For more than a mile we reckon it."

The gun sounded again, booming out there where the darkness of night hid all things.

Great God, could nothing be done for these lives dear to father and mother, and sweetheart, and wife, and little children? must the cruel sea swallow them before the eyes of strong men? would no struggle be made to rescue them from death's grasp? was there no humanity and pity left in the hearts of those who watched their agonies? It was terrible.

Just then the last of a long train of rugged clouds swept by, and the moonlight fell in a sudden flood of white light upon the angry sea. All eyes looked out by one common instinct towards the reefs.

There was nothing but a long black line of rock, around which the waves surged and dashed themselves in remorseless fury, but out beyond the reef those on the beach could see the dark outline of a ship rising and falling, rising and falling, and drifting every moment nearer to the spot that must inevitably prove its doom.

The moonlight was so clear that presently they not only saw the hulk but the masts rising clear and straight against the sky. The sails were torn in shreds, and fluttered wildly, the cordage, snapped and broken, was tossed about in the wind, the dark figures of the sailors hurried to and fro like phantoms; some of them were striving to cut down the masts.

The elements went mad at the prospect of this prey; the waves rushed round and round the ship with the fury of a thousand

demons ; the wind howled ; and there was terror and fury in its voice.

Capri looked on ; her lips were set, her eyes full of horror, her face pale as the dead. She clung to Guy Rutherford yet. His eyes were fixed upon the ship.

“Can nothing be done ?” he said, turning to where the men stood, the salt spray dashing in their faces, the tempest crying in their ears.

The younger men made no answer ; some of them turned away their heads. The old man who had before spoken said, after a deliberate pause,

“Nothing, sir. There’s no boat that ever was built could stand a sea like that ; she would be dashed to pieces before she was twenty yards from the shore.”

In his set face was the look of one who sees death advancing, and is powerless to ward off his blow.

Capri held her breath and listened to the fisherman with a painful eagerness. A great fear came upon her, her hands were clenched tightly until her fingers ached. She could not speak.

The clouds crossed the moon again, and all was intense darkness once more. Then there came a period of painful suspense. Would those clouds ever clear away? The boom of the minute gun sounded at irregular intervals: and once the cry of strong voices fell upon the ears of those who watched upon the shore.

When the moon shone out again they saw that one of the masts had fallen. The clouds had now gone by, the light remained. Every moment the ship came closer and closer to its doom; the lives of those on board hastened to a desperate end. Again their cry rose above the

hoarse fury of the sea and wind, with a wild supplicating sound.

“Can we do nothing to save them?” cried Guy Rutherford again, turning round to the fishermen.

They muttered some words which he could not catch, and turned their backs to him. He set his teeth, and an angry light came into his eyes. One of the women was sobbing wildly. Two years ago she had watched her son from this very spot go down to his grave. Her voice fell on the men’s ears to-night like an appeal for those in deadly peril.

By-and-by one of them, after speaking for some time to the others, said a boat might have a chance of getting to the ship before she split on the reef, if she were put out lower down on the beach. Guy Rutherford caught at the words at once.

"A boat," he repeated. "Get a boat, and I shall go in her, if any man comes with me. Can you see these men, with lives as dear to them and others as yours or mine, perishing before your eyes without striving to rescue them?"

Capri heard him with a sickening fear at her heart, but she never uttered a sound, never moved a muscle.

The waves flung themselves on the strand with a hoarse sullen roar, dragging huge stones and pieces of timber and great coils of sea-weed with them in their retreat, which they had flung up but a moment before.

The noise was deafening. The men to whom Guy Rutherford had spoken made him no answer, but gathered together in consultation. Apparently they came to no agreement; two of the number turned

away, the remainder seemed inclined to follow them. Guy Rutherford could not hear them ; he thought he saw his opportunity, however, and went forward to where they stood, Capri still by his side pale and anxious.

“Take down one of your boats,” he said, in a voice that had in it more of command than entreaty.

They did not appear to notice him. Still undecided they looked at each other, and then glanced out at the sea. Guy Rutherford lowered his brows, a look of scorn came into his eyes.

“Have you women’s hearts in your breasts ?” he asked. “Will you see these men going down alive into their graves, whilst you stand by and make no effort to save them ? If I could go alone I would. Let but one of you come and I will go—if you are not all cowards.”

He flung the last words at them with a scorn that made the sluggish blood run hot in their veins.

"We have women and children depending on us," shouted one of the men.

"All of you?"

"I shall bring my father's boat down," cried out one of the youngest of them, a broad-shouldered, bronzed-faced fisherman scarcely more than a lad. "Who will come and help me?"

He ran up the beach, and some of the others who were left, now half ashamed of themselves, ran after him; the example of one man stimulated the rest.

But even as they moved a wild cry was heard above the fury of the sea, a cry that had in its sound horror, and agony, and despair. Then those on the beach could hear a crash and the sharp sound of

splitting timbers. An answering cry from the women and boys on the shore went up into the night air. A second afterwards and they saw the ship sink ; she had parted on the long-stretching black reef.

Then a great wave, high and steep like a solid wall of water, dashed itself against the rock with a fierce, hissing sound. When it had passed, the white moonlight, shining pale and clear, showed the dark hulk fixed and raised high above the sea, and the figures of some men who had clambered on to the reef standing there clear and defined ; their hands were outstretched, their faces turned towards the shore, their cries rang out above the wail of the tempest.

By this time the boat had been brought down upon the strand ; the men who had before been so tardy now hurried them-

selves in putting in the oars and preparing her for her perilous voyage.

The gale increased, the wind rushed in from sea in mad fury; the waves rose higher and higher and flung themselves with might and main against the cliffs with an angry roar; a few large drops of rain fell with a rattling sound upon the sou'-westers of the fishermen; far in upon the headland the bell of the little grey church, under whose shelter lay the pale and torn corpses of many bodies that the sea in its cruel sport had cast upon the shore, rang out wildly as if crying in fright to heaven for mercy.

The boat was now ready, and an eager, excited crowd gathered around her. Men shouted orders from one to another, women cried and wrung their hands, the shrill voices of boys called out in excitement.

The young fisherman who had brought down the boat was already in her. They waited but the retreat of the waves to launch her on that short voyage that meant victory or defeat, life or death.

Capri had not spoken during the scene —she was dazed and bewildered. Her face was as white as one whom the sea has flung stiff and murdered on the rocks. She had not tried to stay Guy Rutherford's efforts to rescue the lives of these men out there even at the peril of his own.

In this hour of trial she was strong and brave. For an instant Guy Rutherford stepped outside the ring of those around the boat ; Capri was still by his side.

“Capri, my love,” he said, trying to speak in his old cheery manner, “you will wait here for me till I return ; or stay, go up to the house and wait there.”

He bent down over her and looked into her white face.

"Your promise!" she said simply. The strength of a great determination was in her eyes. "I shall go with you even unto death," she added, and her voice was low, but the winds did not drown it before it reached his ears. He did not try to dissuade her, but flinging his arms around her there in the shadow of the cliffs, he clasped her close to him and kissed her once. It was his last time.

"I have never loved you dearer than now," he said.

All this had not taken a minute; in a second he made his way through the little crowd filled with the excitement of its own thoughts and hopes and fears, and stepping into the boat lifted Capri in and placed her in the stern before anyone there had time to question his act.

With a ringing cheer that had at once in its sound something of triumph and yet of a wail, the boat was pushed out from the strand. Guy Rutherford had taken the stroke oar—there were three other men in the boat.

Once Capri looked behind her. The little crowd of white-faced women and stern-looking men on the beach, the gleam of lanterns seen against the high grey cliffs, seemed to sink down, down, down, and then suddenly rise above her. The church bell yet continued to ring out to the wild, pitiless sky, the waters surged and foamed about the boat, and flung clouds of salt spray in the faces of the rowers.

Again the boat sank between two great walls of sea, then rose with a bound. Capri clung to the stern, she uttered no word or cry. The four men worked as they never had worked before, straining

nerve and muscle and strength in their efforts; their faces were white and set, a great determination looked out of their eyes.

They were being driven back again in spite of all their efforts; the sea was too strong for them. The rain came patterning down in heavy drops, clouds crossed the moon, the wind roared in the darkness, the waves struck the boat with a sharp hissing sound, yet the four worked with the energy of despair. Now a monstrous wave half lifted the boat out of the water and flung her several yards in advance; and once the white light fell full upon the sea.

Suddenly there was a crash: one of the stout oars snapped like a child's toy; Capri saw it tossed about by the waves in triumph. The man in whose hands it had broken took up a second oar that lay in

case of need at the bottom of the boat and put it out.

They were nearing the reef, and could see before them about half a dozen figures standing on the black rocks ; the sea was dashing about their feet in fury, as if hungry for their lives. They shouted to those in the boat, and a fainter answer like an echo came from the shore. The boat was now within ten yards from where the survivors of the wreck stood watching her in an agony of excitement and suspense ; another wave might carry the boat close to them. They called out to those strangers who were risking their lives for them with eager words and prayers that were lost in the great tumult of many sounds.

The wind gave one fierce blast, followed by a sudden lull ; the boat sank between two vast waves, then with its freight of

five human lives was lifted up and with a sudden crash dashed violently on the sharp peaks of the reef.

The boat snapped in two.

Capri without a cry flung herself into Guy Rutherford's arms; they folded round her in an eternal embrace. The next instant a wave swept the reef. When it had gone those upon the shore saw nothing there but the sharp, black peaks steeped in the white glory of the moonlight.

THE END.

MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT'S

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